REVIEWED: MYST III: EXILE · TROPICO

TESTED: ALIENWARE P4 1.7GHZ SUPER RIG

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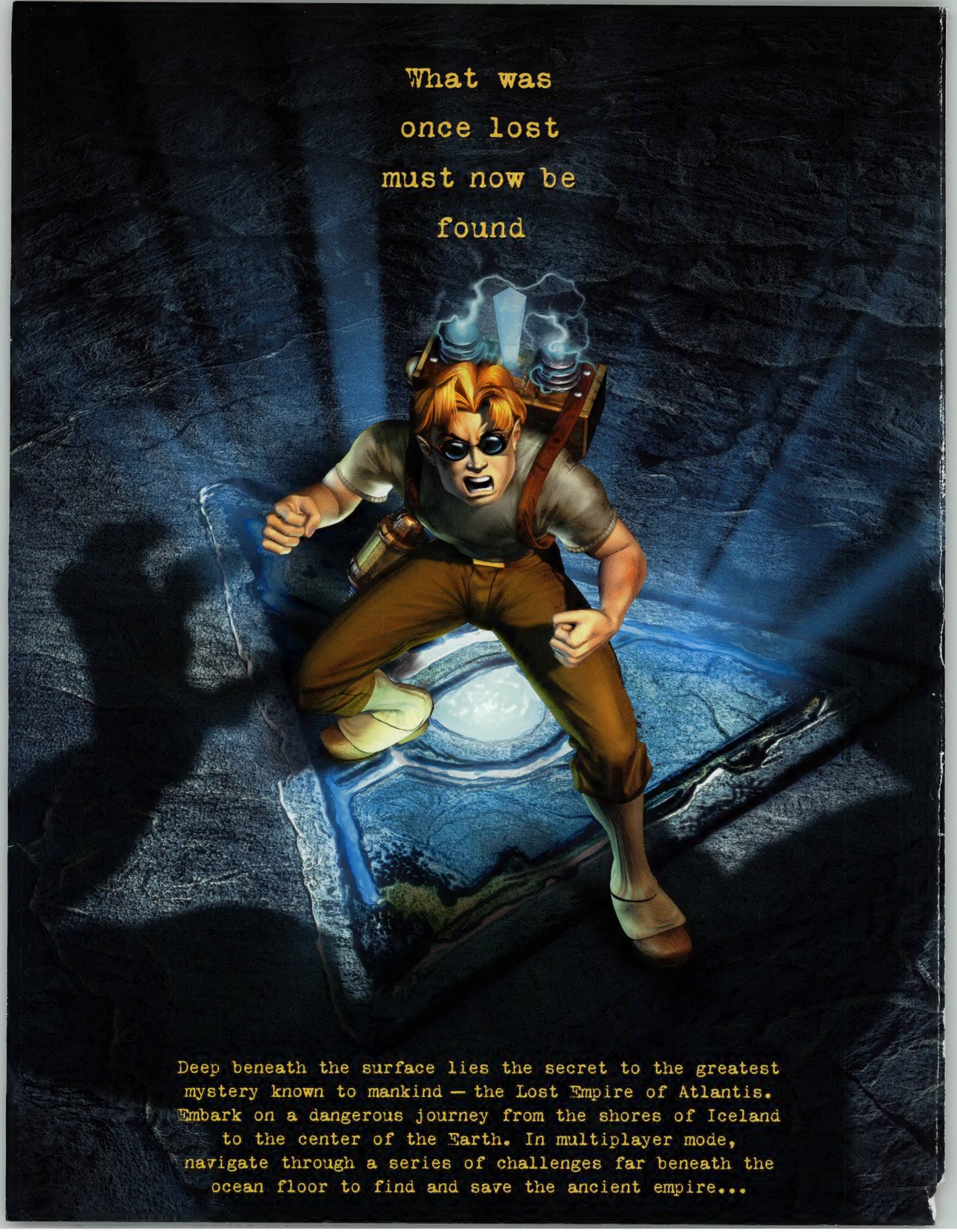
SPECTACULAR SCOOPS
Morrowind · Spider-Man
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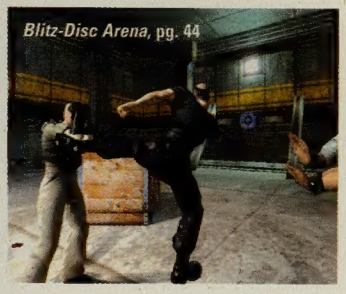
Disney Interactive

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

In stores May 15th.

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PC GAMER
VOLUME 8 · NUMBER 7 · JULY 2001



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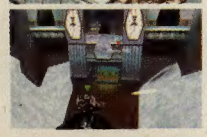

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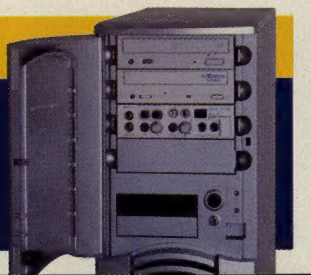
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LETTER FROM THE ED.



"If you're nursing any silly notion that I'm interested in you, forget it. You're just a headline to me."

Welcome to the summer lull. Game companies think that you're all out at the beach, not playing games right now, so new releases are thin. Of course, the only beach I've seen is the virtual one of Omaha, advancing into Hun-held territory in *Day of Defeat*. So we took the opportunity for a trip around the wide world of PC gaming — it's a fascinating insight into the styles and cultures of other countries, witnessed through the games that they develop. From the fearsome German index to that quirky Brit humour [sic] and the Japanese market's affinity for virtual porn, it's a wacky gaming world!

Many of you will recall *PC Gamer* going out on a limb a couple of years ago with a new kind of first-person game. It came from unproven developer Red Storm, but it had the pull of having techno-thriller author Tom Clancy's name attached to it. *Rainbow Six* revolutionized first-person gaming, and we've taken a trip back to the developers to unveil their next foray into tactical first-person action with an exclusive look at *Ghost Recon*.

So that should keep you occupied as you sun yourself on those beaches. And Ronald Williams will have a couple of games from the *PC Gamer* Stack™ to keep him out of mischief after correctly identifying *Dangerous Liaisons* as the movie quote (but in the interests of taste, I won't print his ditty!). The quote's a little tougher this month, so good luck. Keep the feedback coming to *ednote@pcgamer.com*.

Rob Smith

Rob Smith,
Editor-in-Chief

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Serious Sam is the indie sleeper hit of the year, the *Blair Witch* of action games, and you owe it to yourself to at least see what the hype is about. Also, if you have the full version, install the Seriously Warped deathmatch pack in the Files section on the CD.



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BLADE OF DARKNESS

www.rebelact.net/severance • Codemasters
Pentium 350, 64MB RAM, 3D card

Even if you're not interested in third-person action/adventure games, there's one very good reason to install and play this demo: the shadows. They stretch across walls opposite light sources unlike anything we've seen.



STAR TREK: AWAY TEAM

www.stawayteam.com • Activision
Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 3D card

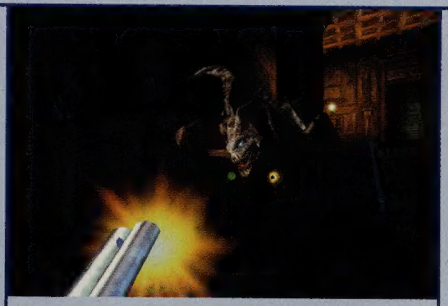
Activision is setting this game to stun. Set in the *Next Generation* era just after *Star Trek: Insurrection*, *Away Team* puts you in command of an away team on alien worlds. The familiar voice of Data (played by Brent Spiner) assists you.



OUT OF THE PARK 3

www.ootp3.com • Out of the Park Productions
Pentium 233, 32MB RAM

If you like baseball, you're sure to enjoy this management sim, whose many features include common stats for every player in the league. The demo lets you play until June 1 of the virtual season — enough time to get a feel for the fun.



CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING

undying.ea.com • Electronic Arts
Pentium 400, 64MB RAM, 3D card

Already an early nominee for Action Game of the Year, this *Unreal*-powered shooter may be the scariest experience you've ever had at your PC screen. The demo starts you out deep into the game with one of the most powerful weapons — the Scythe — and the ability to cast some cool spells.



LEGENDS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

www.3do.com • 3DO
Pentium 300, 64MB RAM, 3D card

This multiplayer *M&M* title is an interesting change from the norm. The demo contains two maps: one where each team fights to possess the princess, and another where they struggle for a sword. Three player classes are available on either side, and dangerous creatures roam the land.



PATCHES

Deux Ex Multiplayer
Serious Sam 1.0c
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Assassin

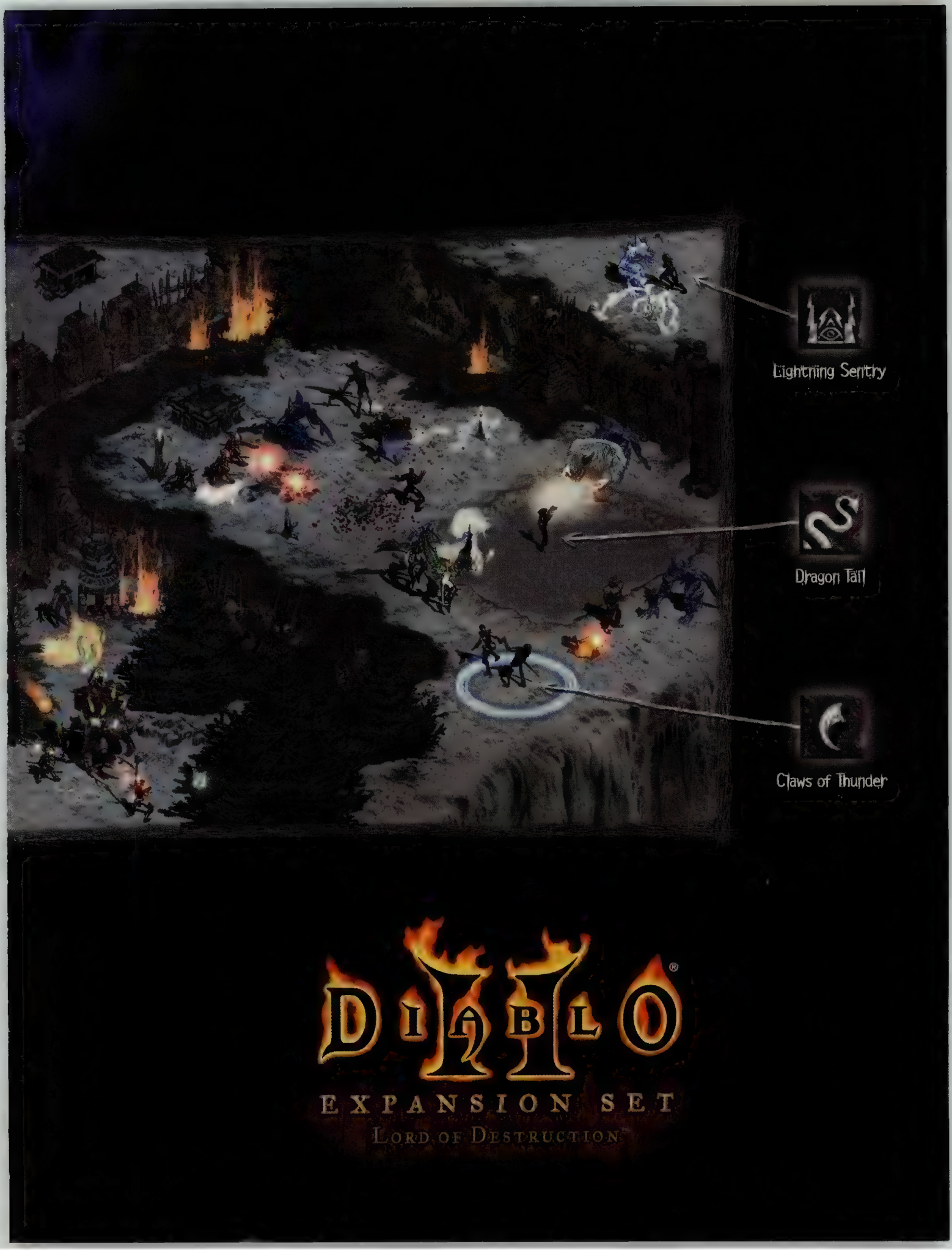
Part of an ancient order dedicated to slaying practitioners of dark magic, these shadowy women are masters of physical combat and psychic assault. Striking silently from the edge of perception, the assassins fight with fluid grace and deadly skill.

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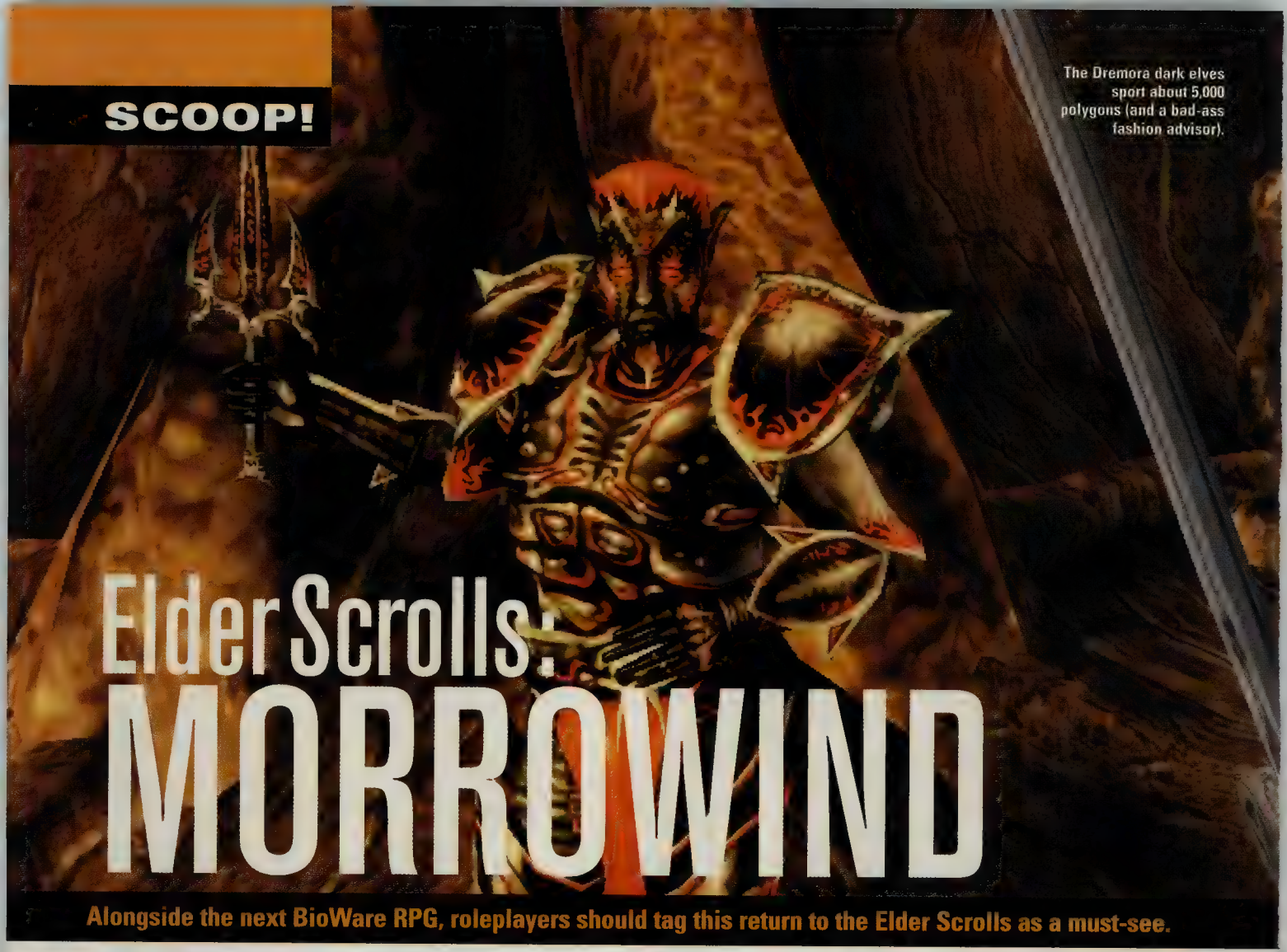
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DIABLO II

EXPANSION SET

LORD OF DESTRUCTION



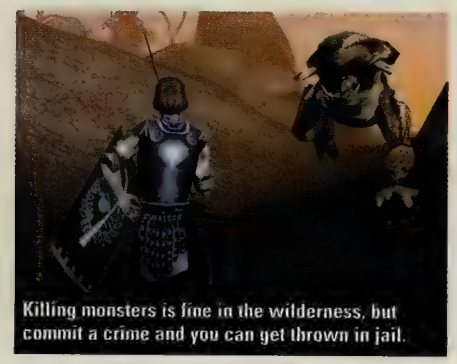
The Dremora dark elves sport about 5,000 polygons (and a bad-ass fashion advisor).

Elder Scrolls: MORROWIND

Alongside the next BioWare RPG, roleplayers should tag this return to the Elder Scrolls as a must-see.

Not since Richard Garriott's classic *Ultima* games have PC RPGs generated their characters with so much creativity. The stat-laden devotion to paper-and-pencil RPG precepts has resulted in random stat roles, class choosing, and re-rolls when you don't like what you were given. That's fine, of course. Developers have learned well that they should never force RPG fans into set roles — let the paying customer choose how he wants to play.

So, in a cut-scene introduction to *Morrowind*, where you dream of a prophecy, you discover that you're being released from a prison island. Onboard the ship, sailing to freedom, you awake with a grim face staring down at you. He asks you your name. You type your response — and that's your name creation. He asks where you're from. You pick and input a location — and your race is decided (from a selection of 10, including orcs). At the customs house on dry land you fill out papers, and in doing so flesh out the remaining details of your character — and get an opportunity to change your initial responses if you didn't realize what was going on during the opening-scene questioning.



Killing monsters is fine in the wilderness, but commit a crime and you can get thrown in jail.

It's a brilliantly simple and subtle method of plunging you straight into the mythology of the game world, welcoming you into an established history and universe. Beginning back in 1993 with the RPG *Arena*, the Elder Scrolls has witnessed the sprawling, unceasing vastness of *Daggerfall*, the more confined adventure of *Redguard*, and the action-focused RPG *Battlespire*. For fans of the series, *Morrowind* doesn't follow a timeline from *Daggerfall*, but will offer all the background and history you could possibly digest. In its strikingly object-oriented gameplay, every book you see on the shelves of the numerous buildings you'll flit in and out of contains reams of background information. By reams, I mean masses and masses — over 375,000 written words in 200 books, in fact!

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Roleplaying

DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks

PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 40%

RELEASE DATE: Winter 2001

IN A NUTSHELL: Revisit the classic Elder Scrolls RPG game world, now looking amazing and backed by a comprehensive editing suite.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: People are *still* wandering around the never-ending world of *Daggerfall*. These fans, and the new audience, are getting a tighter game world to explore. And the licensed NetImmerse rendering technology is spitting out some truly stunning vistas.

While the core plotline centers around a dark cloud causing a blight on the land, you can ignore it as you meander through a vast array of subquests. In fact, the designers estimate that 30 percent of the quests compose the main thrust of the plot (about 40 to 50 hours of gameplay) and the remaining 70 percent are side quests. As the world physically gets darker, and the cloud tightens its grip, you'll have a visible indication of the threat. The result, should you complete the quest, is that the cloud dissipates. "We wanted to make it feel like you made a world change," project lead Todd Howard explains excitedly. "It has to feel like it's something monumental."

Along the way, those books will provide hours of casual reading all by themselves. Up to three-fourths of them will be "useful" in that if they tell a tale wherein a hero uses his axe effectively in pursuing a quest, you'll "learn" from that and your skill will go up. Of course, you don't have to read the entire short story to get the in-game benefit, but with the words penned by veteran Elder Scrolls designer Ted Peterson (the lead on *Daggerfall*), you're pretty much guaranteed an entertaining read.



The organic style of the wizard's town is very distinct. You could join the spell casters, one of the three factions, but you'd miss out on quest options from the other two.

PUT ON YOUR WALKING BOOTS

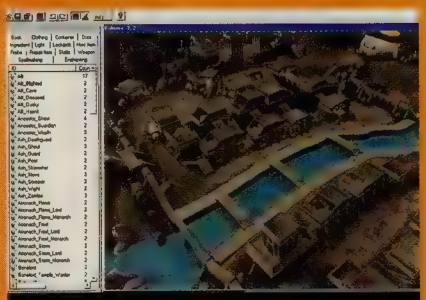
In contrast to *Daggerfall*'s endless world size and carbon-copy towns and villages, *Morrowind* covers a more focused area consisting of some 30 individually crafted towns and villages, a purposefully designed wilderness, and some 500 unique dungeons. It's constructed using the rendering technology licensed from NetImmerse (currently being used in upcoming games *Star Trek: Bridge Commander* and *Freedom Force*, among others) that is allowing Bethesda to build a seamless world, with environmental details like dynamic clouds, weather, and time of day creating a subtle visual ambience.

Once in the game world, your first task is a simple delivery, but it's a 10-minute hike in *real time* to get there. "That's an obscene amount of time," accepts Howard — but with three other villages and a variety of NPCs to meet, it certainly won't be dull.

Throughout these locations will be staged encounters, as is traditional in an RPG. What's unique, however, is that random monsters can also be "leveled." In these situations, the wandering encounter will assess your power (behind the scenes, by looking at your skill scores and equipment) and dynamically adjust creatures' power to give you a challenge, without brutally penalizing you for straying into a dangerous territory while exploring. In fact, any monster you meet can be killed, and if you can see an object on an enemy, it will be on its body when it's dead. Bending the rules of realism in favor of fun gameplay, any creature can use any armor size.

Similarly, in the skill system, any character can use any object, though it's balanced by fatigue (affecting your running speed and endurance) — mages can wear armor, for example, they'll just suck with it. But a thief with leather armor and a good dagger skill will still be effective against a heavily armored, slower enemy. Combat is an intriguing affair wherein time pauses, and you click and hold the mouse button to "power up" your hits, eventually generating a "feel" for the sweet spot on which to

MAKE YOUR OWN RPG



Through this interface, any object can be placed, given scripts, moved, and tweaked.

Sure, editors allowing users to modify games, create their own content, and extend a product's shelf life aren't new, and they're increasingly popular with both developers and a burgeoning amateur development community. The editor shipping with *Morrowind* will blow you away. "To this point we've spent more time on the editor than we have the core game," reveals Howard. That's because the tool you'll get in the box is the same being used to handcraft all those levels and dungeons.

Inspired in part by the flexibility of the *High Heat Baseball* tune file — you can adjust things like how fast a skill increases, and the attributes of any creature or character — the editor uses "plug-ins" wherein each dungeon or location created is flagged as a plug-in and launched with the game. So if you want to cheat, create a house near the game's start, fill it with powerful objects, increase the power of your favorites, plug it in, and go. Now start the game, grab all the great gear, and waltz through. Fun, eh?

Of course, most users will just marvel at the ease with which they can pull and smooth terrain, place and adjust walls, and add text-based scripts for conversation with NPCs. The flexibility and power in this tool is staggering — whole new games will no doubt be added on to the *Morrowind* game universe.

Bethesda plans to "sanction" some plug-ins, giving an unofficial seal of approval to those that don't break the game flow by placing a huge town in the middle of a wilderness, for example. And a full fanboy re-creation of both *Arena* and *Daggerfall* in the new *Morrowind* engine can't be too many months away.

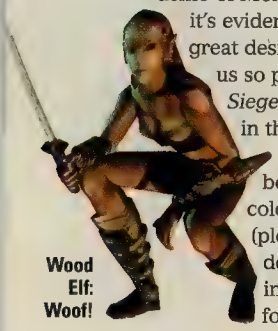
release the attack. You can also affect the hit type using the movement keys to generate chops, slashes, and thrusts. And during the pause you can change weapons and armor on the fly — "it's the fun way to do it," says Howard.

With a defeated foe at your feet you can rummage for any item on his corpse and stash it in your inventory. Four interface boxes will be visible onscreen, but they are all scaleable — you can have as much information or as little as you like by simply dragging out the boxes. It's touches like this — layering the level of information so that you can peel back as much as you want, and having "tool tips"–style help for every object — that show a keen understanding of how RPGers new and old will approach this epic game.



Towns and villages will bustle with NPCs, and you can customize the look of your own armor and weapons with 3D Studio Max and the editor plug-in routines.

Indeed, after our extensive demo of *Morrowind*'s inner workings, it's evident that many of the same great design decisions that have got us so psyched about *Dungeon Siege* are also front and center in this more in-depth RPG. An NPC's attitude to you will be easily visible as the text color moves from green (pleasant) to red (hostile) depending on the questioning path you take. Travel on foot is designed to make you feel like you're in a massive world, but Silt Riders and teleporters will let you get around quickly as you progress. And a few quests will be time-sensitive — "where the fiction makes sense," says Howard — such as bringing a cure to a diseased person. If you arrive too late, they're dead!



Wood Elf: Woof!

Amid an RPG community dominated by Interplay's AD&D licenses and Blizzard's action focus, *Morrowind*'s set to bring a long-standing franchise back into the limelight. So long as the focus remains clear, and the bugs that plagued *Daggerfall* don't return to spoil this party, it'll be well worth the wait.

—Rob Smith

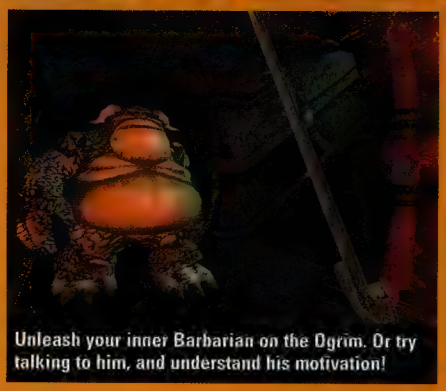


When melee fails, the magic system boasts some 200 spell effects, and lets you make your own spells.

RPG DESIGN FOR DUMMIES



KEN ROLSTON, a legend in the paper-and-pencil RPG industry, is designing much of the core gameplay for *Morrowind*. Famous for helping create *Paranoia*, the classic RPG of a world gone crazy funny, he's a fountain of ideas and understanding of the roleplaying gamer.



Unleash your inner Barbarian on the Ogrim. Or try talking to him, and understand his motivation!

(1) You seem to like referring to yourself as an "internationally celebrated game designer." How long have you been designing games, and what do you have to celebrate?

I'm shocked, *shocked*, to discover I've been designing games since 1982. The "internationally celebrated game designer" bit comes from the ironic observation that my towering triumphs of paper gaming art (my modest contributions to *Paranoia*, *Runequest*, and *Glorantha*, *Warhammer FRP*, D&D, AD&D, and so on) are almost all out of print. ["Look on my works ye Mighty, and despair."] But, being an avid self-promoter, and sharing the pathetic ego-hunger of all artists, I'm content to bask in the reflected light of my ancient glories.

(2) Todd Howard the Barbarian. Discuss.

Is this an essay question? Okay. When designing a game, I want developers to constantly keep in mind a model of the player. "This is the kind of guy who's gonna play this game." And for CRPGs, this is a particularly difficult task, since there are so many different kinds of players. So, for simplicity, I've generalized all CRPG gamers into four basic models: the Barbarian, the Agent, the Mage, and the Pilgrim.

Most gamers, including our lovable project leader, Todd, are *Barbarians*. They are impatient, simple, homicidal powergamers. Puzzles are to be solved with hammers. They place absolute faith in brute force and following the explicit orders of questgivers.

***Agents* are the patient, conflict-avoiding, puzzle-solving, cautious observer-sneaker-snipers. They tend to be patient while observing, but then expect immediate and gratifying success once they've figured out The Solution.**

***Mages* are really just patient, complex, intellectually agile Barbarians, with marked propensities to compulsive hoarding, powergaming, and resource management. The Mage expects to spend a *long* time building a complex set of powers and abilities and accumulating a complete swag bag of magic items.**

The obscure category of the *Pilgrim* is the patient explorer, tourist, roleplayer, and storyteller. The Pilgrim lovingly studies journals, dialogues, and books for insight into the history, politics, and cultures of its peoples, and the geography and ecology of its setting. And last, but not least, the Pilgrim even savors the experience of failure and defeat, disdaining the cheap triumphs of the save-reload.

It's a challenge designing one game to rule the passions of all these very different styles of gaming. But, fortunately, even the Barbarian often has an obscure appreciation of the deeper, more complex rhythms of the Pilgrim's game. And the CRPGs that become classics usually do so on the basis of their compelling depth — provided that Todd the Barbarian isn't *forced* to swim through those depths to get at his straightforward, impulsive, and life-affirming fun.



Controls everything but your blood pressure









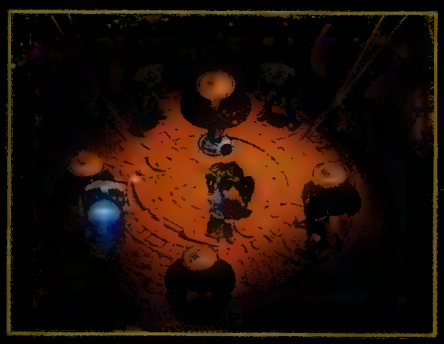
Enter the newest nonstop heart-pounding gaming frenzy, the Nostromo n45 from Belkin, the way in, the way to win, the mega-fast ultra-domination blood-pumping danger controller – evader that with enter – esc – mouse buttons flips you instantly into navigating Windows and drives the mouse cursor from the directional pad, n45 with its 13 programmable buttons, 70 (!) programmable functions, dual analog sticks and USB compatibility, you'll know exactly what you'll do next and be stunned when you do it, the Nostromo n45 GamePad— and the entire line of precision gaming tools from Belkin—gets you in control and breathless

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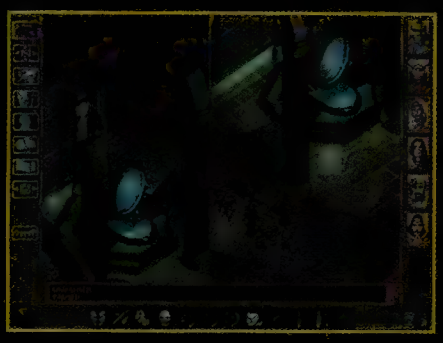


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WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON



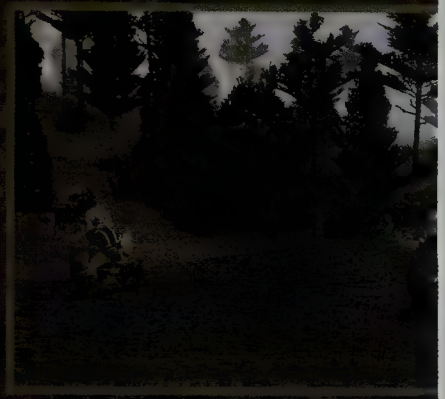
The fur is flying in the former Soviet Union. After the collapse of Russia's progressive government, a hard-line nationalist president invades several of the newly formed republics. From Georgia in the south to the Baltic states in the north, the Red Army is rolling once more.

The only thing standing in its way? You — at the head of the most advanced technological element on the U.S. Army's drawing board. Welcome to *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon*, an awesome glimpse into the future of infantry warfare.

Ever since inventing the technothriller genre with *The Hunt for Red October*, Tom Clancy has forged a virtual industry of geopolitical adventures ripped from tomorrow's headlines. His game development studio, Red Storm (recently acquired by publisher Ubi Soft), made a huge splash with *Rainbow Six*, the first-person action game that ushered in a fresh new wave of "realistic" tactical shooters. Clancy's novel of international counter-terrorism stormed the fiction charts and with perfect timing made the author as big a brand on the computer as he was on the bookshelf.

Ghost Recon is the next step in the evolution of Clancy's FPS brand. Its design philosophy is a detour from the familiar format of police-style counter-terrorism seen in the earlier *Rainbow Six* games. For this brand-new franchise, Red Storm is taking a much more military tack: *Ghost Recon* is a war story, and seeks to render scenes from large-scale military engagements. While similar in look and core gameplay, *Ghost Recon* is a

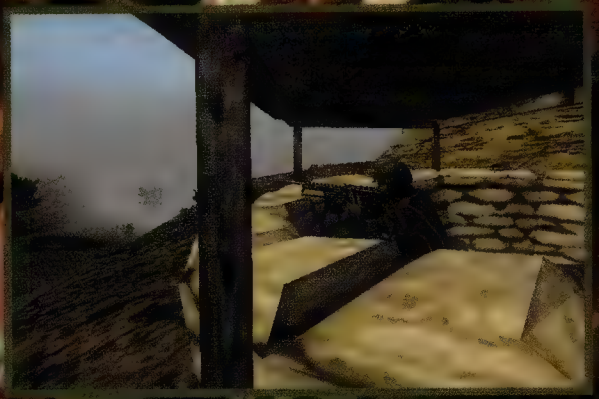




By Dan Morris and Li C. Kuo











Fighting in large outdoor environments, sniping becomes a crucial part of the game. (Inset) *Ghost Recon* lets you snipe from a prone position.

game about soldiers at war — so if you were growing a bit antsy with all of *Rainbow Six*'s meticulous blueprints and police-style rules of engagement, you'll be delighted to know that *this* franchise is taking the kid gloves off.

THIS MEANS WAR

"While the *Rainbow Six* games focused on police actions, we want to make it clear that *Ghost Recon* is about the Army. As a result, your missions will be very different from the missions we've previously done," says Robbie Edwards, the game's associate producer.

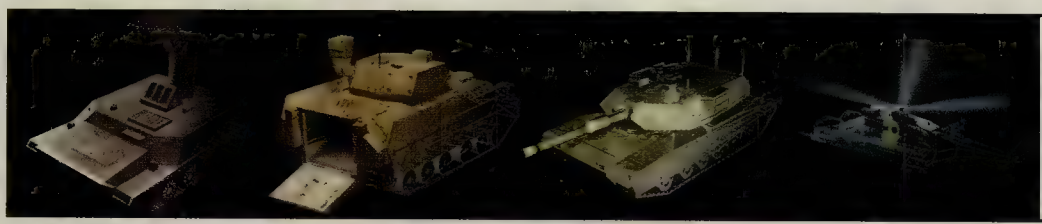
The Ghost Recon unit of the game's title is an elite infantry element composed mainly of American troops. While currently fictional, Ghost Recon is based closely on real Army designs for the "Land Warrior" program, an effort to re-invent infantry operations by concentrating on next-generation technology, training, and weaponry.

From this new position further up the military pecking order, the game opens in Georgia, where extremist insurgents are causing an international ruckus. Deployed at the request of the republic's government, the Ghost Recon team starts off with what are essentially anti-terrorist ops in the Georgian countryside. But soon you're caught up in the turmoil of a Russian invasion, and will quickly find yourself outnumbered by a revitalized Red Army.

The first thing you'll notice about *Ghost Recon* is that its missions are staged in large, wide-open outdoor areas, a deliberate change from the traditional urban/indoor environments of *Rainbow Six*. "Our new engine is much more focused on big open terrain," says Chief Game Designer Brian Upton.

That means you'll be trading in the ornate architecture of cosmopolitan cities for the bombed-out countryside of rural Eastern Europe. The environmental difference is pretty striking. Because the designers still need to give you access to cover, you'll rely on foliage, burned-out cars, shacks, and ravines for stealthy movement and protection from enemy fire during fierce shootouts. Like the *Rainbow* series, you'll still be able to shoot through wooden doors and other soft targets such as glass...and people.

The levels themselves are impressively huge — around 400 x 400 scale meters. This all-new engine, developed in-house, features a much higher level of graphical detail than anything seen in the *Rainbow Six* products. The high-resolution textures are phenomenal: the architecture has never looked better, and the terrain features moving water (rivers and creeks), railroad bridges, and other incidental eye candy. New particle effects will allow for realistic smoke from burning vehicles and houses, as well as a damn cool grenade explosion.



Top-line military vehicles will be peppered throughout the game. Get ready to see the U.S. Army's roughest and readiest hardware rolling through the hills of the former republics.

"[We're spending] lots of time on naturalistic special effects, in terms of making it look like real outdoor terrain," says Upton.

With well over 700 meticulously motion-captured animations being rendered (including hundreds of death animations to lay out every conceivable kill), and over 1,000 polygons for most of the character models, *Ghost Recon* will be a significant step forward in the realism of the troops and their movements. You can now go prone and advance forward at a crawl, setting up to take shots while on your belly. You can also fire from a running crouch now. All elements that have been demanded by the rabid fanbase of the previous *Rainbow Six* games.

NEW LOOK, NEW RULES

New mission types will add a more military bent to the action. No longer will you be limited to the overly familiar hostage-rescue/terrorist-elimination scenarios. This being a full-on battlefield, *Ghost Recon* will present reconnaissance missions, "secure area" patrols, and defensive actions (in which you might find yourself facing waves of charging enemies).

"Because of the more military nature of the game, there are a lot more things we can do mission-wise. For example, we have levels where you wipe out an area and take it for yourself, and one where you have to rescue a downed F/A-18 pilot," says Edwards.

Much as with *Rainbow Six*, you'll be selecting your team from a roster of characters, each of whom is balanced in different skill sets. You can take up to three soldiers into a mission, selecting your team from a roster of six troops. That roster will shift depending on who's wounded or killed, and while your troops are out of the game for good once they're terminated, the hostages you rescue will join your ranks as you complete missions. You'll be rewarded for keeping your boys (and girls) alive — and as they get through missions in the single-player campaign, their skills will improve.

The classic pre-mission planning stage of *RS* has been largely abandoned. "One thing we noticed with the original *Rainbow Six* was that a lot of gamers were just going into the missions without planning. So we wanted to get you into the game and playing faster," says Edwards.

In its place is an "on-the-fly" planning system that relies on a map overlay and waypoint system. Your unit uses the Global Positioning System (GPS) to keep pinpoint-accurate track of its position — and satellites keep tabs on the enemy. That's right: thanks to the miracle of satellite imaging technology, you'll have an eye in the sky watching down on the scene at all times. This is all presented via icons that show where your men are on a simplified 2D map of the area.

Some new features will make the shooting war a whole lot more dangerous than in *Rainbow Six*. Suppression fire is now a key factor in tactical thinking: you can shoot at an enemy position in order to shut down incoming fire, and use the chaos to keep enemies hunkered down. AI will be noticeably smarter (it has to be to keep up with the ebb and flow of action on the field): enemies will drop prone and take



WHAT IS LAND WARRIOR?

A BRIEF LOOK AT AMERICA'S NEXT-GENERATION SOLDIER

Land Warrior is the term for a new infantry fighting system currently being researched by the army that treats each soldier as an individual weapons platform. The goal is to improve a soldier's lethality, survivability, and connectivity on the modern battlefield. So far, none of the systems are completely finalized, but — as you can see from the early version of the LW system shown above — the army has a pretty good idea of what they want the thing to do. Planned features include:

- An individual global positioning system for each soldier
- Integrated battlefield computer (used for calling in airstrikes, communications, and so on)
- A helmet mounted display (for squad readouts, night vision, thermal imaging, and such)
- OICW, or Objective Individual Combat Weapon, a next-generation assault rifle with mounted camera that allows soldiers to aim around corners without exposing themselves
- Next-generation "modular" body armor capable of stopping 5.56mm rounds (like those fired from an M-16)

Ghost Recon will re-create most of the Land Warrior features, such as the GPS and battlefield computer. However, due to technical issues, the gun-mounted camera won't make it into the game. The entire Land Warrior system is currently run by a Pentium III processor using a special version of Windows 2000, all worn conveniently on a side pack strapped to a soldier's leg.



MEN AT ARMS

YOU CAN'T HAVE WAR WITHOUT WEAPONS

Tom Clancy has been known for his extensive (some say downright scary) insider knowledge of military hardware, and the *Rainbow Six* games have been lauded for their realistic portrayal of modern-day close-quarters battles. *Ghost Recon* will be no different. Here's a partial list of the arms and gear (modern-day and future) you'll use:



OICW
Next-generation U.S. assault rifle with integrated grenade launcher



M24
The U.S. sniper rifle of choice



MP5
The world's premier 9mm submachine gun



M9 (Silenced)
Beretta's 9mm pistol with silencer



M136
ATA 4 Anti-tank rocket (watch out for the back blast)

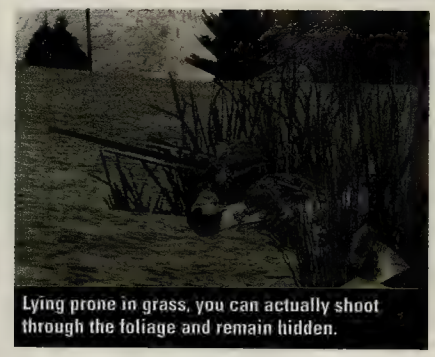
ONLINE BATTLE ROYALE

Rainbow Six and *Rogue Spear* still have fans devoting hours to online battles, and that's an element that Red Storm is certainly not ignoring for this new franchise. Essentially, the developers are aiming to re-create the tense battles that made *RS* so popular — but with the big guns of the army.

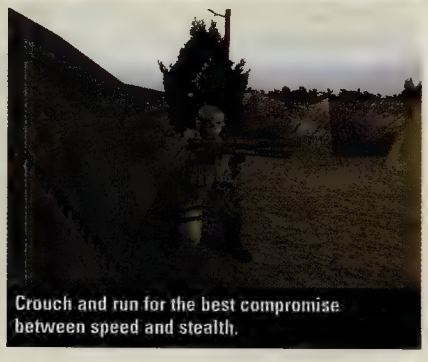
All the single-player levels will be playable in multiplayer mode, with additional maps for online play coming in the final shipping version. The current plan is to support up to 16 players in deathmatch, team DM, and a form of CTF mode, as well as new options. Red Storm is still working on how "persistent" its multiplayer match-ups will be, with the RPG-lite elements unlikely to be transferred to the multiplayer arena.



Character models are built from over 1,200 polygons, and crafted from hundreds of motion-capped animations.



Lying prone in grass, you can actually shoot through the foliage and remain hidden.



Crouch and run for the best compromise between speed and stealth.

cover, angling to put something between themselves and the sound of incoming bullets. Bunkers provide excellent cover for entrenched machine-gun crews, necessitating stealthy approaches for grenade assaults. As a welcome change, the AI enemies will no longer be able to take a snap shot and hit you in the head from a mile away. Upton says, "Now if the AI sees you from far away, he'll think 'It's too far to engage effectively from this range,' and he'll try to sneak up on you." If the enemy soldier is with a group of buddies, he'll lay down some suppression fire in *your* direction while his buddies move out to flank you.

You'll be able to employ the same techniques to advance on the enemy, as Upton assures us that the teammate AI has been drastically improved. "Your teammates will be able to take much better care of themselves now. For example, if they're given a waypoint, rather than just walking straight for it, they'll actually pick out the best course to reach it, taking into consideration things like cover, and enemy positions," he notes.

New weather and visibility effects will make things even hairier, as snow, rain, and fog play havoc with your best-laid plans. The sun's glare will interfere with your ability to scope targets while sniping. Darkness will demand use of your night-vision equipment. (In fact, segments of certain levels will be unplayable unless you're in night-vision mode.)

As any smart soldier knows, the battlefield of tomorrow will more than likely be a populated environment, adding a new dimension of civilian interaction. You'll have to cope with this added burden to the war zone. In certain missions, refugee traffic will be a serious concern, and some of the "civilians" will actually turn out to be partisans who will take shots at you. And you thought masked terrorists were trouble.

One major change to gameplay is the addition of in-game saves. How this will be implemented hasn't been finalized yet, but for now you can save as often and wherever you like. "We wanted the missions to run longer due to the larger levels and we realized that we just *had* to have in-game saves," says Upton. However, if you want to keep it realistic, you don't have to use it. You'll still jump into a teammate's body when you get capped, so the game doesn't have to end when you die.

Missions will be noticeably more violent than those in the *Rainbow Six* series, too. "In *Rogue Spear* you always had to watch your fire and be controlled. We wanted to have a chance to just cut loose with a M249 SAW machine gun. One of the things you'll notice is that in the Army, they have *big* guns," says

Edwards. One mission will find your unit pinned down and facing charging hordes of hostile Russians. And while the one-shot-kill philosophy of realistic damage is still in full effect, the rules of engagement in *Ghost Recon* are those of wartime, not peace — so prepare to live or die on the razor's edge of battlefield combat.

DO YOU HAVE THE SKILLZ?

Ghost Recon incorporates a new "RPG Lite" system designed to get you intimately involved in the development of the soldiers in your unit, and with their advanced and specialized skills.

As mentioned, survivors of combat missions will become more skilled in their specialties. After each mission, you'll have acquired a certain number of experience points (dependent on your satisfactory completion of mission objectives, minus penalties for such nastiness as excessive civilian loss of life). You can then spend these points upgrading your troops' skill sets.



About 150 of the 700 motion-captured animations in *Ghost Recon* are death animations.

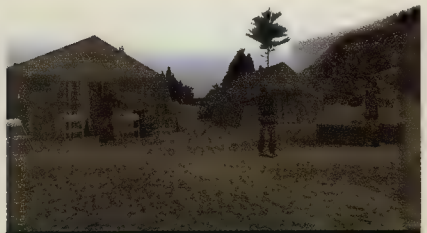
A key emphasis of *Ghost Recon* will be on the individual skills of your troops. In *Rainbow Six*, squaddies tended to be generalists, and mission prep was more a matter of equipment deployment. *Ghost Recon* is about specialization. "We thought that in *Rainbow*, there weren't a lot of reasons to pick a certain guy. I found I was picking Santiago Arnavisca just because he was the very first guy," says Upton. In *Ghost Recon*, your troops are highly trained in a few areas, and the game strictly limits the types of weapons and gear that they can carry into the field. In other words, snipers snipe, demolitions people blow up bridges, stealth scouts sneak quietly — but nobody does it all, so marshaling your troops is of supreme importance. To further this specialization, certain weapons will be usable only by certain characters. For example, only snipers can use sniper rifles, while only recon specialists will use silenced weapons.

There are four major skill sets to be aware of as you craft your perfect Ghost Recon unit. The first is weapons: the better you are with them, the steadier and narrower your targeting reticule. Stealth increases a soldier's ability to move without making sounds — *very* important when making approaches to enemy positions. Endurance is a function of how much damage a soldier can sustain and how much he can hump without becoming encumbered. Leadership, the most intriguing skill, provides a boost to everyone but the person with the skill — having a good leader will provide a bonus to your team members' other skills.

Because characters will be specialized within narrow skill sets like sniping and demolition, they'll need to become proficient with the weapons specific to their job description. For this reason, you'll need to balance the firepower of a machine-gunner with the need for technically skilled but firepower-deficient members of the squad.

A NEW BATTLEGROUND

Our lengthy look at *Ghost Recon* afforded us a mouth-watering preview to a new brand of *Rainbow Six*–style action. Unshackled from the "civic duties" of highly calibrated counter-terrorism operations, our boys are now free to do what we've always wanted to do in Clancy's techno-thriller world — break out the baddest hardware and cut loose. *Rainbow Six* and *Rogue Spear* were long multiplayer standards around these offices, and we're already running through boot camp in an effort to shape up for the coming war. It's Red Storm with the safety off. War's hell — ain't it heaven? PCG



Enemies react smartly to your incursions, defending their camps.



Your opposition comes in various levels of dress and hardware sophistication.



THERE'S NOTHING CONVENTIONAL ABOUT IT.

Plunge back into intense World War II combat with the most realistic tactical and strategic action game ever created. Maneuver Sergeant "Tiny" McHale and his elite squad of soldiers deep behind enemy lines utilizing their combined expertise to set up ambushes, control troops and conduct night missions.

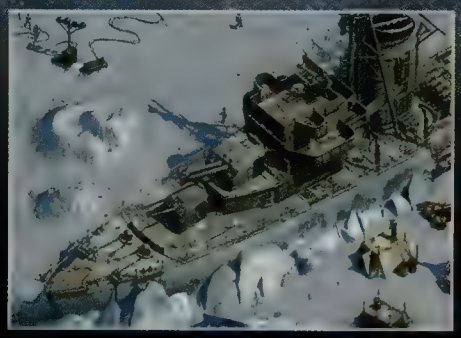
Interact like never before with detailed environments based on actual WWII locations. Go covert into the heart of the Third Reich, defend a Northern European submarine installation, and infiltrate the headquarters of the Japanese Army.

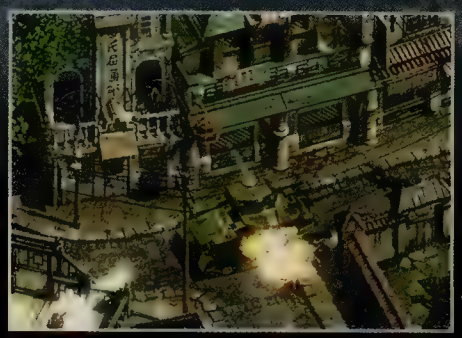
New 3D engine offers a 360° rotatable environment and seamless movement in/out of buildings, submarines, planes and under water.

Complete simultaneous control of multiple gameplay windows in real time.

New commandos include a thief, a seductress, and a dog – adding stealth, distraction and distribution strategies.

Go into battles with others in a cooperative multiplayer mode.







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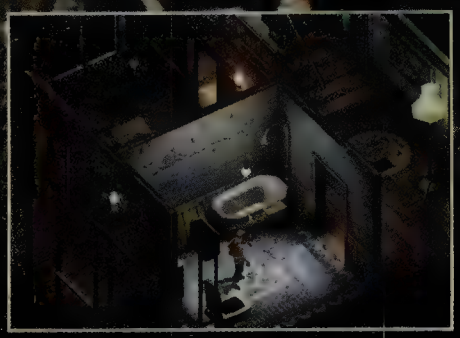
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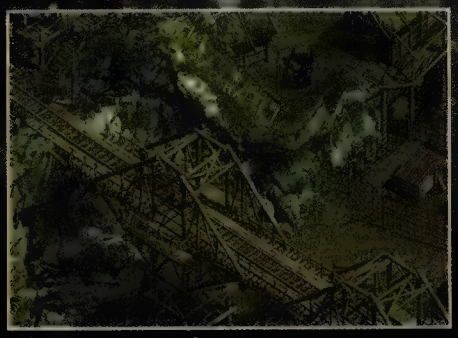
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Sergeant "Tiny" McHale
Expert in close combat & bladed weapons







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It's the Minute Man versus henchman of the evil Nuclear Winter. Superheroes on the PC? Finally!

FREEDOM FORCE

Superheroes vs. villains in a battle royal. Will the city survive? It's up to you...

The evil Communist supervillain Nuclear Winter is set to unleash a startling new horror on New York City. Only one group stands between the Big Apple's trembling citizens and subjugation: *Freedom Force*. Can you save the day?

Fans of superhero comics have long asked to face that challenge on their PCs; *Freedom Force* is the bold new answer to their prayers. Coming from Boston-based developer Irrational Games, a start-up outfit headed by Ken Levine (*System Shock 2*, *Thief*), it's got Game God talent at the helm. Will it be the game that finally lifts the superhero genre out of its epic PC slumber? Talk about a cliffhanger.

FEROCIOUS FUNNY BOOKS

Freedom Force is a real-time strategy game set in a 1960s-era New York City that is almost 100 percent destructible. Buildings can be toppled. Buses and cars picked up and thrown. Streets torn up and civilian citizens sent scrambling for their lives. All this well before Hillary became a Senator.

In short, it aims to be every comics fan's dream of tights-wearing tough guys duking it out in a completely clobberable metropolis. "It's definitely inspired by the Stan Lee/Jack Kirby age of Marvel Comics," says Levine. "Good guys are good and evil is evil."

You're in charge of Freedom Force, a superhero team that responds to superpowered threats around the city. Over the course of the single-player campaign, your roster of heroes will change as different plot developments emerge from nefarious, villainous scum. The heroes are true star-spangled types from the earliest, gaudiest era of modern superhero comics, and each comes complete with a humbling weakness and inspiring origin movie (rendered in perfectly etched comic-book panel sequences).

There's Minute Man, an avid anti-Communist who patriotically defends the red, white, and blue. El Diablo, who was embroiled in gang warfare until the gift of flight allowed him to see beyond the petty conflicts of the street (yes, there are heaps of Stan Lee–storytelling tropes). Man-Bot is Iron Man, except he's called Man-Bot. The villains are equally cut and dried. Nuclear Winter is a hulking Russian bear replete with fur coat and red star on his babushka hat. Déjà Vu can create multiple copies of himself, and at one point generates an Evil Twin Ray that will force your heroes to fight evil versions of themselves.

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Real-time strategy

DEVELOPER: Irrational Games

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 60%

RELEASE DATE: Winter 2001

IN A NUTSHELL: Our long nightmare may soon be over: we may soon have the superhero game that cruel fate has long denied us.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: Are you kidding? *Freedom Force* is the long-awaited superhero strategy/RPG. Helmed by the designer of some of Looking Glass Studios' most-loved games, *FF* has powerhouse talent behind it — and is showing true comic-book inspiration.



When Commie supervillains take over an aircraft carrier, you'll need to get medieval.



And there's a lot more WHAMs and POWs and KA-SPLATs where that came from...



Comic-book fans will love the ability to tailor individual superpower effects to their liking.

All of this goofy Silver Age fun is played out from a top-view strategy perspective reminiscent of *X-COM*'s deployments (but in full-3D with a zoomable camera courtesy of NetImmerse rendering technology). The game also offers significant RPG elements, but the emphasis is on street-level, set-piece spectaculars.

Levine describes *Freedom Force* as a "pause-time" game. While it's essentially an RTS, the action can be paused to allow you to come to grips with the tactical situation. (In true comic-book fashion, the "pause" is justified by a supervillain's tirade — when you're in pause mode, the villain launches into a traditional rant, justifying the gameplay opportunity for you to consider your next action.) They ain't kidding when they say they're bringing comics to life.

THE WALLS COME TUMBLING DOWN

One of the most exciting things about *Freedom Force* is the sheer destructibility of the city. New York will be rendered in mission stages of several city blocks, filled with civilians going about their daily business until chaos ensues. The game's sophisticated physics engine will allow for a colossal level of mayhem.

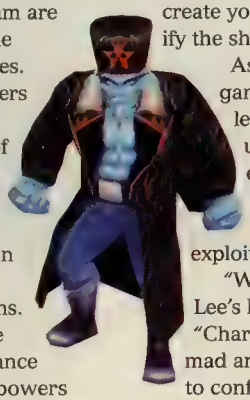
In many places, the very street can be torn apart and the underground sewer exposed (which actually plays a major part in the plot when giant ants invade). In addition to street-scene battles, various missions will take you to the tops of skyscrapers, the deck of an aircraft carrier, and even the home halls of the Freedom Force headquarters.

With an accurate NYC under design, the plan is to set villains loose in a living city that responds to these unearthly events. "We want to produce a city that doesn't care what you're doing — until a fireball is coming at people," says Levine. "Then panic breaks out."

Cosmetic damage will be fearsome. Fires will burn, storefront windows will shatter, and entire buildings will be reduced to a heap of rubble as you watch. However, prestige points will be lost if you approach your mission objectives with a blood-and-thunder attitude and cause too much destruction to the game's peaceable citizenry.

YOUR VERY OWN SUPER FRIENDS

Freedom Force is almost as much RPG as it is strategy game. Let's face it: half the fun of reading comics is watching how characters evolve over the course of a book's run. Knowing this, Levine and team are allowing you to help determine the progress of the game's superheroes.



You'll take only four crimefighters out on any given mission, but the continuing story will steer some of your decisions. For example, if the Minute Man's sidekick is kidnapped, he'll insist on coming along for the mission. Also, certain heroes will insist on going after their arch-rivals in various missions.

But for the most part, you'll be on your own to decide which balance of skills, personalities, and superpowers will be best suited for the task at hand. "There will be versions of the Fastball Special," Levine says, referring to one of the X-Men's signature combined-powers attacks. "Different characters will complement each other in different ways, and you'll have to coordinate them as a team. And, ideally, every hero will get one chance to shine as an individual."

You can use *FF*'s pre-constructed heroes or roll your own character, using an RPG system derived from classic pencil-and-paper systems like Champions. You can even use the included Python scripting language to create your own power effects, or modify the shipping set of special abilities.

As you progress through the game, you can spend your collected prestige points on ramping up a character's skills and powers. Every hero has a unique weakness, and you can be sure the game will find ways to exploit them for storytelling value.

"We're really working in Stan Lee's backyard," says Levine. "Characters will be seduced, will get mad and leave the team; [they'll] have to confront their weaknesses. These will be very motivated characters." Thankfully, Levine and his team are motivated by a deep appreciation of comics, and we're extremely excited about their work. We think Stan Lee will be proud.

— Dan Morris



The "living" city: pedestrians will be in danger as superhumans collide.

www.pcgamer.com

Spider-Man

The PlayStation success story swings, climbs, and jumps its way into high resolution.



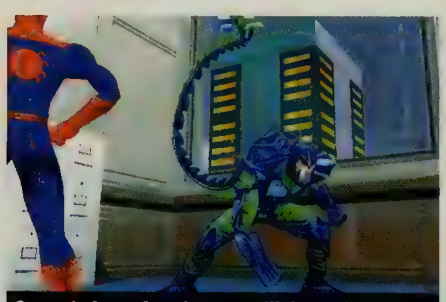
Whether you're running from the police or getting the drop on Venom, you'll move and *feel* like Spidey.

It takes only two words to make a PC gamer grimace: *console port*. The real hardcore people will even shudder with nausea.

However, for every 20 crappy ports (*Dino Crisis* et al.), there are those few that take the shining quality of gameplay and give it a good technology boost, like *MDK 2* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*. If our predictions are correct, *Spider-Man* is about to join that exceptional group of standouts.

Developed for the PlayStation by Neversoft, the same gamesmiths who forged *Tony Hawk's*, *Spider-Man* has already sold over a half million units on that console. The N64 and Dreamcast ports were welcomed with open wallets. The migration to the PC is a matter of course — but thankfully, it has the potential to put all other versions to shame.

Livesay Technologies is behind the PC conversion. Having ported *Tony Hawk's*, they're already familiar with Neversoft's architecture, and have code ready to replace some of the PlayStation-specific assembly. The process should be a piece of cake, with time left over for preening.



Several of your favorite supervillains make an appearance, including Scorpion.

"The PC version will include higher-resolution geometry and textures than those originally used on the PlayStation," says Lead Programmer Dan Zahn. "It'll also come with all of the advantages of the PC platform: bilinear interpolation, true Z-buffers, and higher-resolution gameplay."

This is excellent news for those who like to see the difference between $99 and $1,000 gaming systems. Zahn adds that the PC *Spider-Man* will also support software rendering to appease the two guys who still haven't made the leap to 3D acceleration.

The game's plot has Spidey framed for theft, and his good name is left in your hands. Luckily, Peter Parker (mild-mannered photojournalist, and our hero's alter-ego) witnesses the imposter and is on the case from the get-go. Fans of the comic will get a kick out of tracking and fighting heretofore 2D super-villains like Carnage, Rhino, Mysterio, and the nefarious Dr. Octopus. According to programmer Chris Robbers, "the game sticks very close to the Marvel universe. You'll recognize all of the characters from the *Spider-Man* series."

Part of the allure is simply interacting with the 3D environment using Spidey's tools and abilities. Spidey expends his primary resource — webbing — to swing through the skyline, bind and damage enemies, and shield himself from enemy fire. You also climb walls and ceilings with ease, and fight hand-to-hand using that distinctive Crouching Spider style.

PC gamers will enjoy a major boost in sound quality. Zahn boasts: "We're planning to use 44KHz 16-bit samples for all effects. Music will be Redbook [CD audio] or MP3-quality, depending on the number of tracks and disc space." Marvel Comics creator Stan Lee, who provides much of the game's voiceover work, will sound better than ever.

Livesay is aware of the control issues that have plagued console ports, says Robbers, who assures us, "We're changing the game's menus to take advantage of the mouse, and gamepads/joysticks will be supported if you want to use them."

Unfortunately, there are no plans to alter the save-game system, which means you'll be able to save only between levels. Also, due to the port's short development cycle, Livesay has no time to add multiplayer capability or additional maps.

Still, if the studio can port the core single-player game to high-res as successfully as *Tony Hawk's*, we'll have some welcome action in the PC aisle. True believers and comic virgins alike should keep their eyes on this one.

— Jeremy Williams

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Action

DEVELOPER: Livesay Technologies Inc.

PUBLISHER: Activision

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 80%

RELEASE DATE: Fall 2001

IN A NUTSHELL: Help Spidey restore his good name after being framed, while saving the world from fiendish, mutant evildoers.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: Originally developed by Neversoft (*Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*), *Spider-Man* is already a huge hit in console land. Cosmetic enhancements should give PC players the best-looking (and -sounding) version of the webslinger's acrobatics.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW:

EarthLink DSL

USER RATING

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Connectivity	★★★★★
Ease of Use	★★★★★
Reliability	★★★★★
Support	★★★★★

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hands-on

As some big-name games finally near release, playable late-beta builds land on our desks. Here's where we give hot-off-the-burner first impressions of how these titles are coming along.



The game's tutorials are superb. In this one, you learn how to distract guards using your pet rat. (Bottom) Divide the screen into as many as six fully functioning pieces to better navigate your surroundings.

Commandos 2

DEVELOPER Pyro Studios PUBLISHER Eidos CURRENT RELEASE DATE Summer 2001

THE ORIGINAL *COMMANDOS* was awesome — but flawed. Each of the game's six WWII commandos had very specific abilities, and getting through each brutally hard mission was more like solving a puzzle than playing an action-based strategy game.

The beta build of *Commandos 2* that I've been playing recently indicates that many of the frustrations with the first game have been alleviated. At the core of this improvement is the fact that each of the sequel's nine commandos (three newbies join the new team — including a dog) can handle many more general tasks than before. All have the ability to drive vehicles, for example.



Beyond that, some of the new actions in *Commandos 2* are simply amazing. The coolest I've seen so far involves the sniper. This character can be in a house, looking out of a window into another home across the way. He's able to see a 3D image of the room through his sniper scope and can take out enemies from there. It's amazing.

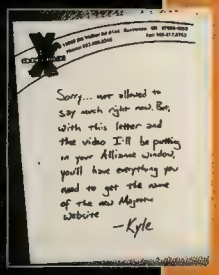
With only a couple months left to go before the game's release, I'm finding myself growing more and more giddy at the prospect of whooping up on some Nazi scum. With incredible visuals painting an authentic picture of war-ravaged cities, hopefully this detailed strategy game will get the kudos here in the States to match the original's European glory.

— Greg Vederman

Majestic

DEVELOPER Electronic Arts
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
CURRENT RELEASE DATE June 2001

I COULD TELL YOU ABOUT *Majestic*, but then I'd have to…you know the drill. The conspiracy is coming, and after delving into its web of intrigue — and its mind-boggling use of technology that we audaciously consider under our own control — I can assure you that the hype is real. *Majestic* is absolutely incredible. Already, from just playing through the pilot episode over the course of about a week, it's quite evident that *Majestic* represents the first clear, defined step into a new generation of interactive entertainment.

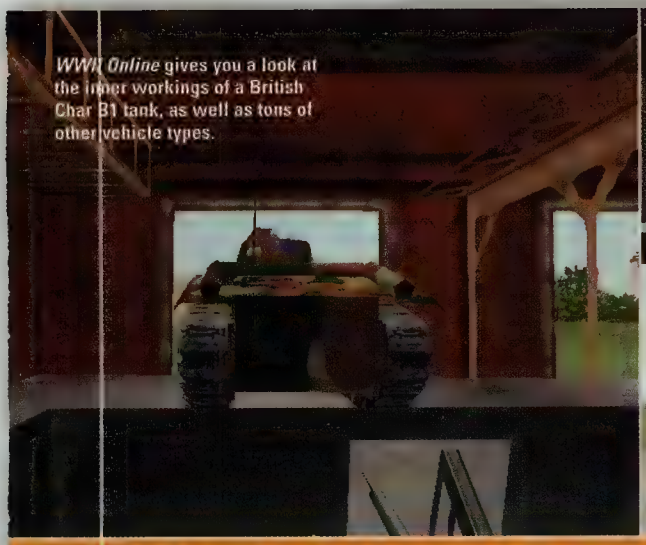


At its core, it's a puzzle and adventure game. As the pilot episode politely tugs you through the story introduction, you'll be compelled to share these unique gaming moments with friends. Just yesterday I answered my cell phone and was physically threatened by a grainy, anonymous voice. Then there are the faxes, the emails, and the instant messages. Puzzle game? Sure, but it's camouflaged beautifully in some technical wizardry.

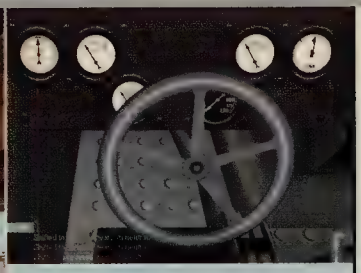
We should point out that some of the communications contain mature language. While adults will appreciate this aspect (as I did), you'll want to configure the game carefully with the time of day it may use your primary and secondary phone numbers.

Personally, my suspension of disbelief became total not far in. To get the most out of *Majestic* is to let yourself really enter into its world. Meandering through the web sites and links from the central control page, it's difficult to tell when you're crossing out of game territory and into actual web locations. It's more difficult when you actively choose *not* to try to "break" the game. You can — it's pretty easy — but I wholeheartedly recommend that you give the pilot a fair chance when it's launched in June. If you see it as hokey, it'll be painfully hokey. But bite just a little bit, and you'll find yourself locked in a whole world of intrigue — and you'll love every minute.

— Rob Smith



WWII Online gives you a look at the inner workings of a British Char B1 tank, as well as tons of other vehicle types.





World War II Online

DEVELOPER Cornered Rat Software PUBLISHER Strategy First CURRENT RELEASE DATE June 2001

I'M ALONE, SO VERY ALONE In the distance, I see the names of my allies hanging in mid-air, beckoning me to join the fight. I take off toward them — first at a walk, then a light jog, and finally in a full-blown dash. Not at the speed-demon pace of *Quake III* or even the slightly more human gait of *Rainbow Six*, but at a "realistic" velocity that takes me a *very* real 20 minutes to reach the fire zone.

Welcome to the closed beta of *WWII Online*, the world's first massively multiplayer hardcore sim of the land, sea, and air battles of The Big One.

For first-person hotshots weaned on the "realism" of war-themed games like *Day of Defeat* and *Firearms*, *WWII Online* will be unlike anything you've ever played. Every aspect of physics, machinery, and damage is modeled as authentically as possible.

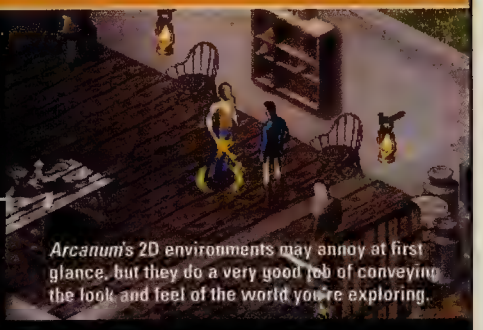
For example, the first time I tried to drive a German tank, it took me about 15 minutes to figure out that I had to crank the engine, manually change gears from neutral to drive, and then apply the throttle before I could go anywhere. And through it all, I was staring at miles of empty countryside through a thin rectangular slit.

Coordinating with allies by chat, such as calling for truck drivers or requesting an airstrike, is a crucial part of the game. Out of the thousands of gamers expected to participate in the final release, only about 20 to 30 were on hand during the closed beta, so my WWII experience was somewhat desolate. Expect that to change when *WWII Online* goes live in June. Then I can *really* get my hands dirty.

— Chuck Osborn

Arcanum

DEVELOPER Troika Games
PUBLISHER Sierra
CURRENT RELEASE DATE June 2001



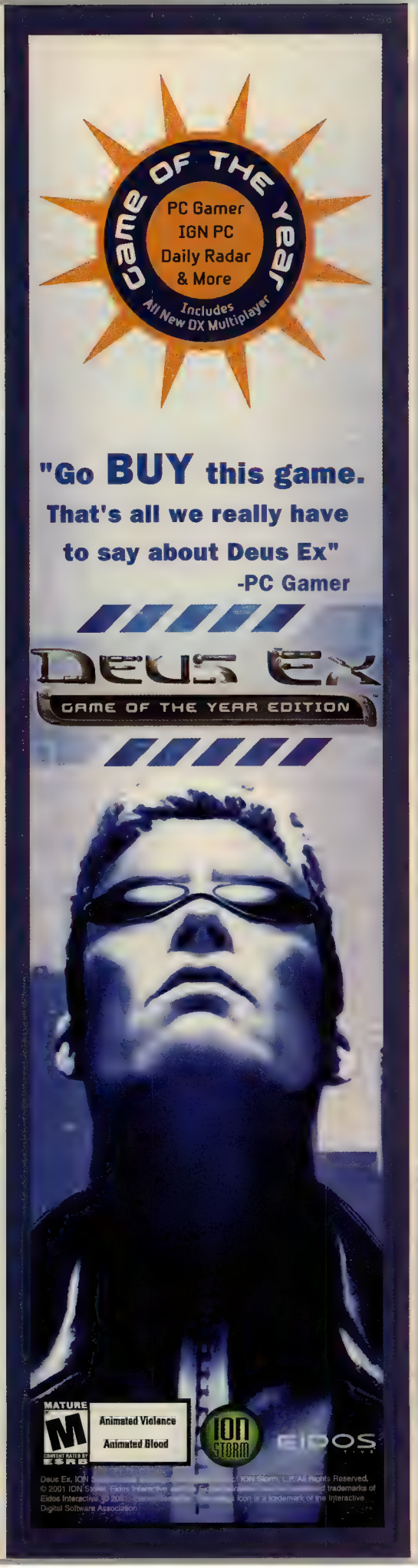
Arcanum's 2D environments may annoy at first glance, but they do a very good job of conveying the look and feel of the world you're exploring.

IF YOU LOVED the *Fallout* RPG series, you've probably been keeping a watchful eye on *Arcanum* since it was first announced. Thankfully, *Arcanum*'s designers — which include several lead members of the original *Fallout* team — haven't forgotten their roots.

Graphically, the game is very reminiscent of *Fallout* and *Fallout 2* — with a twist, of course, because the universe itself is so very different. Instead of a post-nuclear wasteland, *Arcanum* is set in a world populated with Tolkienesque characters such as elves, dwarves, and orcs, all caught in an industrial revolution. This integration of themes is a tremendous idea because it allows you to roleplay your character as a technology user, a magic user, or a combination of both, in a world where both are accepted as commonplace. Overall, the balance of skills feels well-weighted, and while choosing the middle path has its advantages, you'll never acquire the really cool stuff in either category unless you commit fully to it.

From my short time with the beta, I've seen enough to know that I don't want to ruin the experience of playing the final product. *Arcanum* seems like it's going to be one hell of an RPG.

— Greg Vederman





Operate your Mafia empire on a 24-hour day/night cycle. Run legit business by day, and illegal interests by night.

Gangsters 2

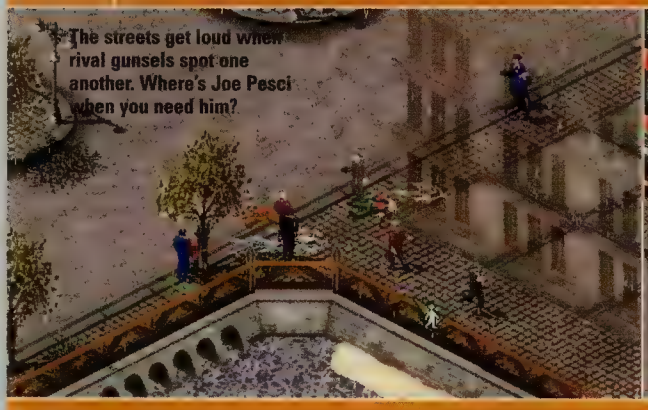
DEVELOPER Hothouse PUBLISHER Eidos CURRENT RELEASE DATE June 2001

WHEN WE HEARD Eidos was readying an RTS set in the world of Prohibition-era gang warfare, we were salivating. Unfortunately, the original *Gangsters* was merely okay, and didn't really do much to capitalize on its fantastic setting (or innovate much in the way of RTS gaming) – we wanted to see *The Sopranos*, dammit.

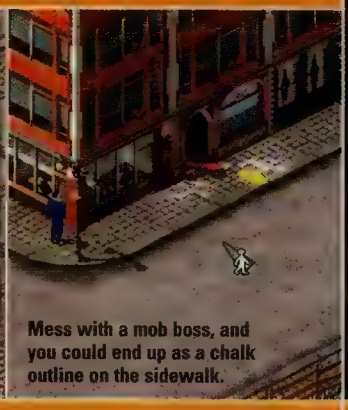
Gangsters 2 is an effort to do the job right. After running a late beta through its paces, we definitely see a marked improvement over the original. The best addition is a round-the-clock play cycle: a 24-hour day elapses as you play through each scenario, and as day turns to night, long shadows and moody street lighting add a rich Coppola sheen to the proceedings. The city itself features gorgeous period detail, with the curbs full of 1930s cars and pedestrians wearing detailed Depression-era garb.

As an RTS, though, I'm still not sure *Gangsters 2* has made many strides. You control teams of hoods on various assassination, arson, and bribery missions, but there still doesn't seem to be much depth. I do quite enjoy operating legal "front" businesses by daylight hours and then switching to illegal businesses by night — lots of sly fun. *Gangsters 2* should make you happy if you don't demand much tactical depth from a strategy game, but it's definitely seeming like a "lite" RTS.

— Daniel Morris



The streets get loud when rival gunsels spot one another. Where's Joe Pesci when you need him?



Mess with a mob boss, and you could end up as a chalk outline on the sidewalk.



An Albion paladin, fighting for her life, surrounded by the Dragon Ant Queen and her fearless minions

Dark Age of Camelot

DEVELOPER Mythic Entertainment
PUBLISHER Mythic Entertainment
CURRENT RELEASE DATE Fall 2001

IF YOU'RE FAMILIAR with Arthurian legends, this MMORPG is going to appeal immediately, as it's based on a weave of pure fantasy and Arthurian plot. Even if you couldn't care less about King Arthur, Excalibur, and Guinevere and you're bored with *EverQuest*'s punishing high-level game, or if you're disillusioned with *Asheron's Call*, *Dark Age of Camelot* could be just the tonic you need.

It's certainly excited this ex-*EQ*-er, who is fortunate enough to have sweet-talked his way onto Beta 2 of *Dark Age* on behalf of *PC Gamer*. Even at this early stage it's shaping up well: Mythic is paying attention to crucial issues such as implementing a well-thought-out, rewarding, and meaningful quest system, and steering the game away from the dreaded "camp-athons" that *EverQuest* features.



A troll-run town in Midgard

When ready for final release, *Dark Age* will feature three realms — Albion (the Britons), Midgard (the Norse), and Hibernia (the Celts) — all warring with each other. The hordes of adventurers in each land will defend unique relics that confer bonuses on the realm and its players. Should an opposing realm steal your relic, they'll get the bonus, so realm invasions and wars have a real purpose.

By nature, this will be a PvP game, although you'll be pretty safe in your own realm, with legions of guards and fortifications to protect it. However, when adventuring near the frontier, matters will be spicier. Look out for a full preview in next month's *PCG*.

— Darren Allan

Lineage The Bloodpledge

A pledge in blood is never to be broken. Within the body lives only the love of its blood.



Multi-Player Online Game

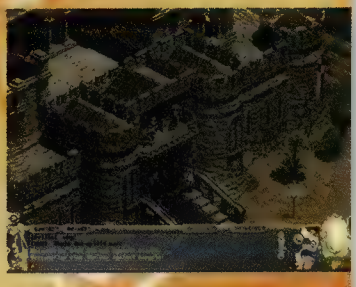
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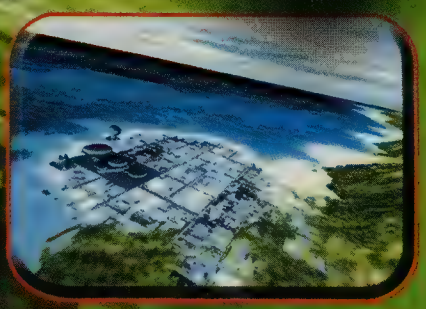
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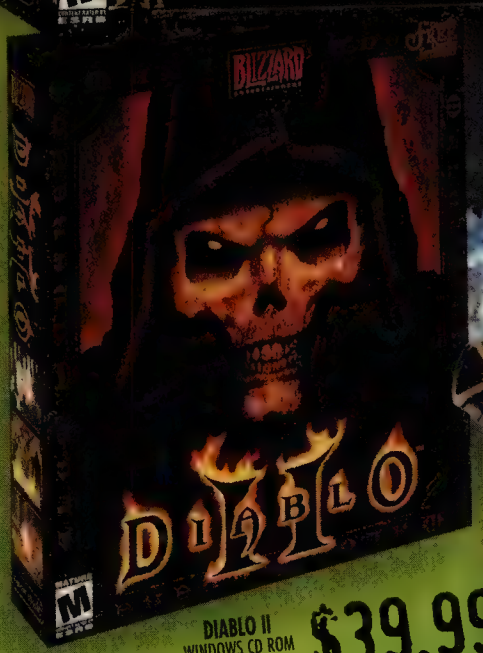
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MORE THAN GAMES

From action figures to novels, games merchandising is *hot*.



(Above) The *Alice* figures were sculpted by Tony McVeigh and Marc Newm... who did sculpting work for the *Star Wars: Episode I* and *Jurassic Park* movies. (Right) Game-based novels are an increasingly popular merchandising opportunity.

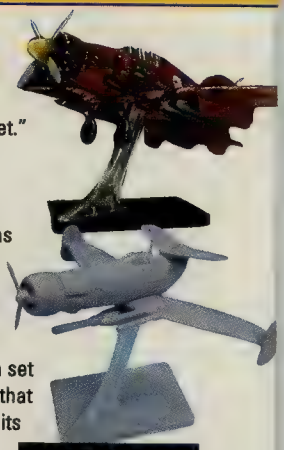
A few years ago, the local comic-book shop was filled with the usual array of superhero figures, statuettes, and other paraphernalia. But something started to happen around the mid-1990s. Suddenly, Superman was sharing shelf space with a busty brunette named Lara Croft. Spider-Man stood shoulder to shoulder with a well-muscled alien-killing machine named Duke Nukem, and Arthur C. Clarke novels were within eyeshot of fiction exploring the *StarCraft* universe. According to The NPD Group, by 1999, videogames merchandise was bringing in $98 million a year.

Today, big-name PC games like *Diablo II*, *EverQuest*, and *WarCraft* have enough licensed merchandise attached to their names to satisfy any fanboy collector. And it's not just here in the States. In Korea, *StarCraft* madness has taken over the country, and characters from the popular Blizzard RTS can be found on everything from bags of Cheetos to tennis shoes. Mike Schimmel, sales manager with Diamond Distribution, a popular comic-book and toy company, tells us: "Twenty to 25 percent of our action figures are now videogame-related. It's the fastest-growing portion of our action-figure market."





Sadly, with the game's demise, this slick *Ultima Worlds Online: Origin* figure will never be released.



Crimson Skies toys break the game-character norm.

TEST RUN

One of the earliest success stories was with Blizzard's set of *WarCraft* and *StarCraft* figures. Blizzard most recently released a set of *Diablo II* figures that has sold 120,000 units since June 2000.

Another licensing victory has been with Electronic Arts' recent release of a line of figures based on its gothic action game *American McGee's Alice*. According to Terry Smith, senior director of art production at EA, "Our initial production run of 28,000 figures sold out in three weeks in U.S. sales alone." Considering that each of the figures retails for anywhere from $13.95 to $16.95, it's easy to see why EA executives are pleased, and are looking for other franchises to take advantage of the merchandising boom. The line has been so successful that a second generation of *Alice* figures is on the way, with the addition of new characters such as Tweedledee, Tweedledum, the White Rabbit, and the Caterpillar.

More companies are getting in on the action after seeing the success of Blizzard's and EA's merchandise moves. Milo's Workshop, the company that produced the *Alice* figures, has already signed on to create toys based on games such as *Crimson Skies*, *MechWarrior*, the *Myst* series, and *Max Payne*.

Toys are just a portion of these merchandising explorations. Novelizations of *WarCraft*, *Doom*, *Diablo*, *StarCraft*, and even *Ultima* are already on store shelves. A book based on *Neverwinter Nights* will be released at the same time the PC game comes out, complete with an intriguing twist: among its collection of short stories will be hints and tips that lead readers to hidden areas in the game. A novel based on *Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal* is also on the way.

There are even pen-and-pencil versions of *Diablo II* on store shelves now that combine all the elements of the top-selling game and add in some good ol' 2nd Edition D&D rules. If board games are your fancy, then you can try out the *Crimson Skies* or *StarCraft* tabletop strategy games, which should also now be available at your local comic-book store or games store.



ReSaurus' snazzy *MechWarrior* toys should delight fans.

KOREA STILL BLIZZARD-CRAZY

Blizzard continues to be the pioneer in this gaming side-industry, with fans snapping up everything from *StarCraft* music CDs to T-shirts to baseball caps, and more. The developer even released a special DVD that contained high-resolution versions of every cut-scene from *StarCraft* and *Brood War*, it sold out in two days.

A big part of this new push toward merchandising can be attributed to the rabid Korean audience. "Korea is our No. 2 market next to North America," says Neal Hubbard, director of marketing for Blizzard. Given this success abroad, it's no surprise to see some of the product placement filter to the States.

But things don't always work out, and for every game that gets canned, there's a slew of tie-in products that get the axe as well. The most recent victim has been the Todd McFarlane–designed *Ultima Worlds Online: Origin* figures. These beautifully crafted figures will never see store shelves.

Still, game companies are encouraged by the sales of these collectibles so far, and are convinced there's a healthy market for these products. In Hubbard's eyes, "Anyone who has $50 to spend on a game has $15 for an action figure." The proof can be seen here in the *PC Gamer* offices, where *Diablo* figures and Lara Croft models abound. It's even gotten to the point where we're anticipating the figures as much as the games they represent. Dave Denton, director at Milo's Workshop, says: "Wait until you see the Max Payne figure. It's one that *everybody's* going to want to get." As if waiting for the game wasn't hard enough already.

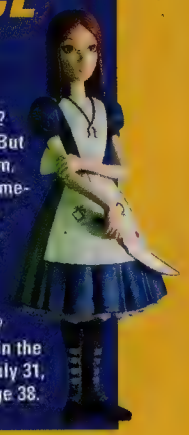
— Li C. Kuo



Here's a sampling of the famous *StarCraft* goodies from Korea.

A **PCG** CONTEST

WIN A FULL SET OF *ALICE* FIGURES



Having trouble finding those *American McGee's Alice* figures? That's because they're sold out! But we've got a way you can get them. Just send us a picture of your game-related toy collection. We'll give the gamer with the most impressive assortment of game-based merchandise a full set of the first-generation *Alice* figures. Email all entries to *eyewitness@pcgamer.com* with "Alice Toys" in the subject heading. Contest ends July 31, 2001. See additional rules on page 38.

NOW AND THEN

The Top-Selling Games Today...

Rank	Game and Publisher	PCG Rating
1	The Sims House Party Electronic Arts	73%
2	Black & White Electronic Arts	95%
3	Tribes 2 Vivendi (Havas)	89%
4	The Sims Electronic Arts	96%
5	The Sims Livin' Large Electronic Arts	85%
6	RollerCoaster Tycoon Infogrames	89%
7	Age of Empires II Microsoft	94%
8	Diablo II Blizzard	94%
9	Half-Life: GOTY Edition Vivendi (Havas)	97%
10	NASCAR Racing 4 Vivendi (Havas)	95%

SOURCE: THE NPD GROUP • STATS ARE FOR APRIL 1–7, 2001

...And This Time Five Years Ago

Rank	Game and Publisher	PCG Rating
1	WarCraft II Blizzard	96%
2	Myst The Learning Company	95%
3	Civilization II MicroProse	97%
4	Duke Nukem 3D GT Interactive	93%
5	Descent II Interplay	88%

SOURCE: THE NPD GROUP • STATS ARE FOR APRIL 1996

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

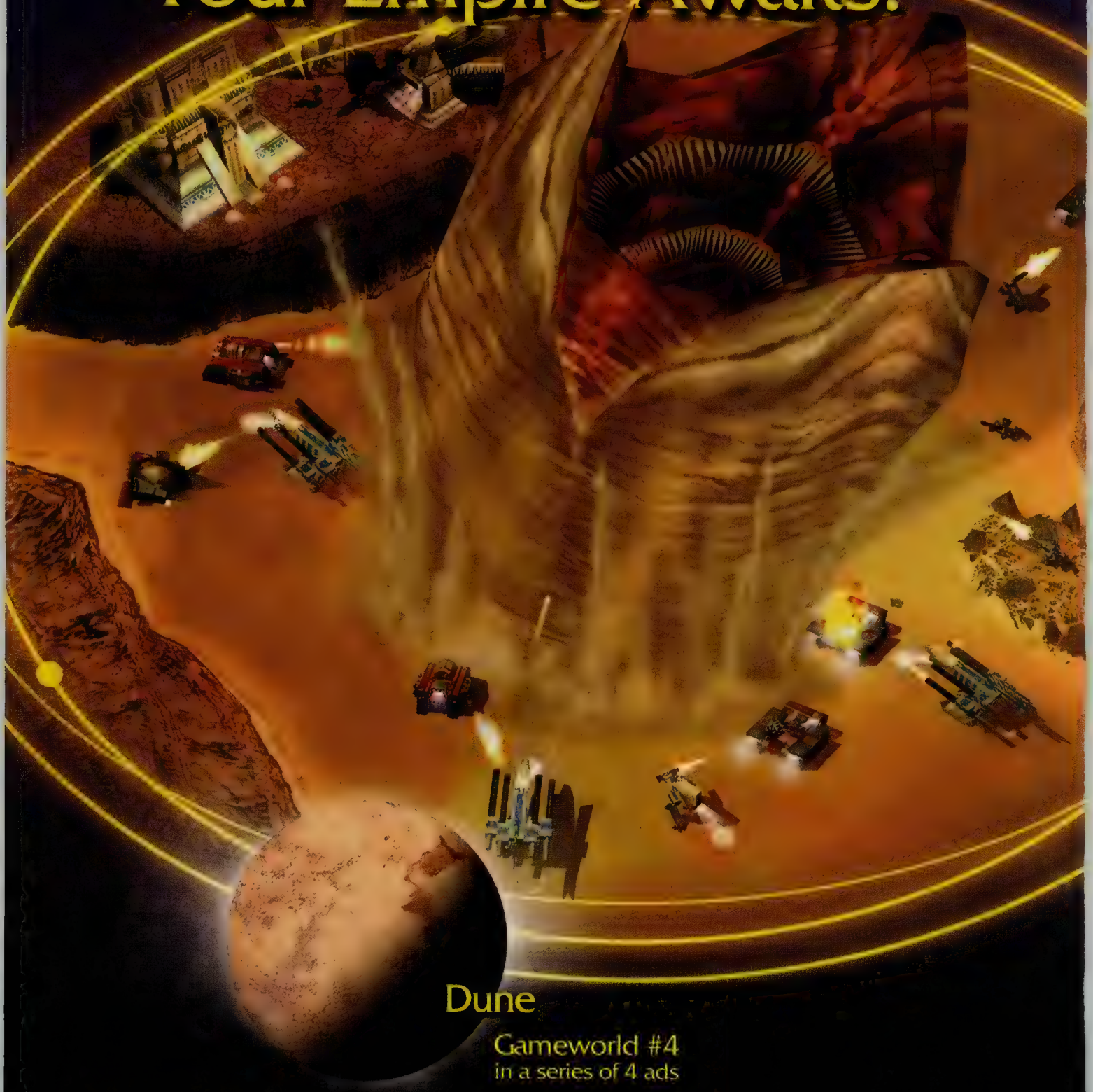
Don't forget that Design Lab will be returning next issue! See the rules on page 20 of last month's Eyewitness section. Send your submissions to *design@pcgamer.com*, or mail them to Design Lab, PC Gamer, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005.

A massive expansion pack for Westwood's hit RTS *Red Alert 2* is in the works. Westwood says *Yuri's Revenge* will be the largest add-on it's ever made: it'll include a new side to play as (a psychic army led by Yuri), plus the usual mix of new units and maps

Actress Jeri Ryan has signed on to do the voiceovers for her *Voyager* character 7 of 9 in the *Elite Force Expansion Pack*. The add-on will also include a patch that adds her voice to the original *Elite Force*. The pack should be available in stores now.

It was bound to happen sooner or later: Infogrames has nabbed the license to produce games based on the sickeningly popular reality show *Survivor*. So far, no details have been released. We're just grateful WizardWorks didn't get the rights.

Upon These Dunes, Your Empire Awaits.



Dune

Gameworld #4
in a series of 4 ads

Westwood Studios

www.westwood.com

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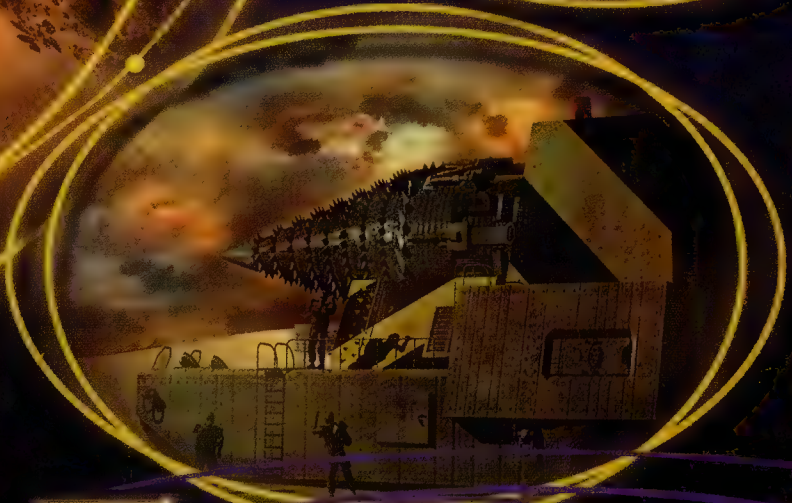
EA GAMES

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

BLOOD
VIOLENCE







Actual In-Game Screenshot of Dune

- Battle for Dune as one of 3 unique Houses: the noble Atreides, the evil Harkonnen or the secretive Ordos.
- Play solo, head-to-head co-operatively with a friend, against the computer or take on up to 7 others in all-out mayhem.
- Align with any of 5 powerful subgroups, including the stealthy Fremen to access amazing new units and technologies.
- Explore 5 different landscapes, including lush prairies, industrial wastelands, frozen tundra and the harsh desert of Dune.
- Experience firsthand the full 3D universe of Dune - one of the greatest science fiction sagas of all time.

COMING JUNE 2001

EMPEROR

BATTLE FOR DUNE™

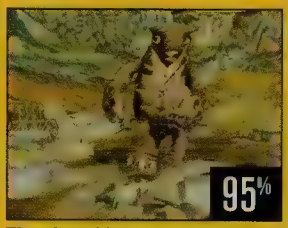
Superior RTS Gameplay. Stunning 3D Worlds.



PC GAMER RECOMMENDS

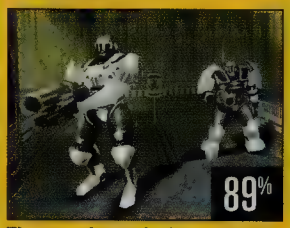
You missed an issue? Shame on you! Luckily, we're nice enough to point out a few games that have perked up our ears here at *PCG*.

BLACK & WHITE



There's nothing quite like ruling the world. *B&W* amazes us all.

TRIBES 2



The eagerly awaited team-based shooter is finally here. Yeah!

KOHAN: IMMORTAL SOVEREIGNS



Terrific multiplay and beautiful 2D graphics round out this nifty RTS.

FALLOUT TACTICS



Break out the mutant repellent and load up on ammo: it's time to play.

R.E.D. ALERT!

A new agent model reveals how amateur mod makers can get their talents and products in front of paying publishers.



Evil Dead: Hail to the King is one of many games that R.E.D. has helped bring into existence.

Today, game development "in-house" at a publisher has become the exception, not the norm; by most industry estimates, more than half of the titles published in 2000 (for all gaming platforms) were "third-party" projects, created far beyond the walls of the company that funded, marketed, and distributed them.

As Dan Morris discussed in March 2001's Extended Play column, the spread of powerful, affordable development tools, coupled with the networking freedom of the Internet, has spawned a host of talented lone-wolf gamesmiths who have largely replaced the old company-nurtured project teams. The best of these *enfants terrible* boast highly marketable skills and fresh, creative ideas for and about games. But, as Sturgeon's Law reminds us, "Ninety percent of everything is crap." So, as Morris succinctly put it: "What's needed now is an effective way for publishers and large development houses to locate and identify amateurs with the potential to be big players…or better yet, to find crews that are ready to get the job done *right now*."

Just after that issue went to print, we learned about an ambitious new outfit that seeks to do just that. The company's name is R.E.D. (Representing Entertainers and Developers), and, while the trademark may be new, the roots of the enterprise are surprisingly deep. The gentlemen who founded it — Paul Cunningham, together with his brother Matt, who now handles public relations — are seasoned veterans when it comes to gaming.

Eight years ago, Paul was a recruiter for a headhunting firm that placed programmers with mainstream software giants such as Microsoft and Oracle. A passionate cross-platform gamer, Paul approached his bosses with a proposal for extending their activity to include videogame programmers. The response, he remembers, was not enthusiastic. "They just weren't interested — they couldn't see any profit in that area." So in May 1993, Paul started a company called Interact, which specialized in placing game programmers, artists, animators, and designers.

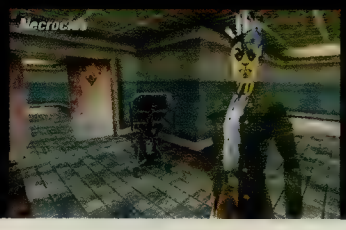
Soon, Interact was handling *teams* as well as individuals. "Someone would call and say: "I've got three or four really good guys, we've already shipped a few successful games, and we want to form our own company. You guys already have contacts and relationships, so could you act as our agents and introduce us to people who have projects and are looking for third-party developers?" "Okay," we'd say. "Get your résumés together and we'll make some calls, set up some meetings, and see if some companies want to fund a very talented core team."

Initially, Interact did such matchmaking on an experimental basis. Pretty soon, though, Cunningham had brokered enough successful matches to warrant

CONTEST RULES No purchase is necessary, and only one entry per household, per month, will be counted. Anyone can vote, but only United States residents are eligible to win prizes, and the offer is void in FL, RI, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law. Your chances of winning depend on the number of entries we receive. Failure to follow the rules will result in instant disqualification.

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

NovaLogic has signed fantasy/sci-fi artist Brom to do the character design for its upcoming gothic first-person shooter *Necrocide*. Brom's previous game-related work includes character design for *Doom II* and *Heretic*.



Yet another *EverQuest* add-on has been announced by SOE. Named *The Shadows of Luclin*, this expansion pack includes the usual assortment of new lands and enhancements as well as a new, as yet unnamed, race. It's due out later this year.

Electronic Arts has a new submarine game in the works. Dubbed *Sub Command*, it puts you in the captain's seat of modern-day submarines from around the world. The roster includes 688(I)-, Akula-, and Seawolf-class subs.

dedicating a separate division to creative-team deals. This "Team Representation Division" of Interact eventually spun off to become R.E.D.

Instead of bouncing from gig to gig, R.E.D.'s developer clients receive guidance through the rigors of setting up long-range business-growth plans and strategies, so they can follow up an isolated success or two with a growing portfolio of successful, fulfilling projects.

It works like this: Let's say that R.E.D. happens to know about four very talented developers who've done great previous work on a racing game, but who are poised to take a job with a company that doesn't even *do* racing games — just to keep bread on the table, or because somebody's brother-in-law asked them onboard. R.E.D. might know about another company that *wants* to do a racing game, or that might want to in the near future *if* they had access to the right talent. At this point, the stars come into alignment and R.E.D. takes action to bring the two parties — who otherwise wouldn't know about each other — into a mutually happy union. Ideally, this arrangement gives R.E.D.'s publishing connections more and better choices, and steers its developer clients toward jobs that are more rewarding to them, personally and financially. "We organize the talent to match the project," says Cunningham, "*when both parties are ready.*"

"Say we know that an ace programmer — somebody who's coded a couple of best-selling roleplaying games — is going to be available *at the same time* as a terrific team of artist/animators *and* a guy with great chops as a level-designer or world-builder. And they're all big fans of the *Gibbering Ghoul* movies. We can take that package to the studio that owns the rights to those films and say: 'These guys are committed to making a great game based on your property. Here are their credentials, and we can vouch for their track record. Are you interested in funding such a project?'"



"We organize the talent to match the project when both parties are ready."

—PAUL CUNNINGHAM
FOUNDER, R.E.D.

As a matter of fact, R.E.D. recently pulled off just such a coup by matching Heavy Iron Studios with THQ, to develop games based on THQ's license for the wildly popular cult-classic *Evil Dead* films.

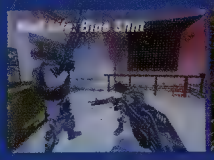
"Super agents" probably *will* have a significant role to play in the foreseeable future. But for some small and well-established game companies, the whole concept — for the moment, at least — is moot. We talked to people in several such companies, and the president of one of them (who chose to remain anonymous) summed up their attitude thusly: "We already have plenty of good personal contacts throughout the industry. If an agent comes to me and says, 'We have up-to-date files on 700 people and companies,' I would have to reply, 'That's fine, but based on our experience, only 10 percent of them would even be interested in the kind of games we make — and I already know who *they* are.'"

Still, new developers just getting off the ground may find R.E.D. very appealing, especially if they've yet to make contacts of their own. And the cost of R.E.D.'s representation? A very reasonable 10 percent. Everybody, at every level of each deal package — on both sides of the often-contentious developer/publisher relationship — enjoys more and better options, greater personal satisfaction, and improved financial prospects. At least, that's the theory. And in truth, it's a system that has worked well, more often than not, for authors, performers, and sports celebrities. Why shouldn't it work just as well in the gaming industry?

— William R. Trotter

THE PCG RELEASE METER

Woo-hoo! Check out this lineup of gaming goodness, all heading to your PC! Thanks to Rich LaPorte for putting together this list for us. Find all the latest release dates at *www.gonegold.com*, and send any release-date news to *laporte@gonegold.com*.





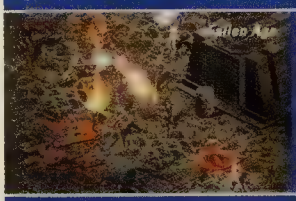


	Title	Publisher	Date	Prognosis
JUNE	Battlecruiser ME	3000 AD	06/05/01	About now
	World War II Online	Strategy First	06/06/01	Targeted
	Shogun: Warlords Edition	EA	06/06/01	Should be
	Redneck Racing	Interplay	06/07/01	Uh huh
	Emperor: Battle for Dune	EA	06/13/01	Fingers crossed
	Anachronox	Eidos	06/14/01	Weapons readied
	Startopia	Eidos	06/14/01	Blasts off
	Deep Sea Fishing II	Interplay	06/15/01	Ice down the cooler
	Steel Soldiers	EON	06/15/01	Z ready
	Anarchy Online	Funcom	06/15/01	Likely
	Half-Life: Blue Shift	Sierra	06/19/01	Later
	Antaeus Rising	Interplay	06/19/01	About now
	Independence War 2	Infogrames	06/20/01	Should be
	Alone in the Dark 4	Infogrames	06/26/01	Slips
	Diablo II: Lord of Destruction	Blizzard	06/26/01	July/August
	Commandos 2	Eidos	06/28/01	Unlikely
	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	06/30/01	Looks good
	Pool of Radiance	GAME Studios	06/30/01	Give it a week
	SFC — Orion Pirates	Interplay	06/30/01	Likely
JULY	MechCommander 2	Microsoft	07/04/01	Around here
	Destroyer Command	GAME Studios	07/05/01	Probable
	Silent Hunter II	GAME Studios	07/05/01	Likely
	Conflict Zone	Red Storm	07/06/01	Trying
	Motor City Online	EA	07/20/01	Green light
	Gangsters 2	Eidos	07/27/01	Hopeful
	Throne of Darkness	Sierra	07/30/01	Possibly

WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

What the hell is *Fallen Age*? This massively multiplayer online RPG just popped up out of nowhere to snatch the No. 1 spot. Well, it's kinda like *Diablo* crossed with *Ultima Online* — or, at least, that's our initial impression of the early beta we've been trying out. It's also got a powerful fan base that recruited support to force it into the top spot.

Be heard. Send in your vote to *eyewitness@pcgamer.com* with "Waiting Is the Hardest Part" in the subject heading. One lucky gamer will get a free game. See additional rules on page 38.



1. Fallen Age
2. Shadowbane
3. WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos
4. Max Payne
5. Duke Nukem Forever

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

Impressions is pounding away on an add-on pack for *Zeus: Master of Olympus*. Due this summer, *Zeus Official Expansion: Poseidon* lets you try your hand at ruling Atlantis. New gods and heroes are just two of the features planned.

We're not terribly surprised that Infogrames has closed its E-mail Games section. Originally launched by Hasbro Interactive in 1999, the service let users play simple games via email. Why anyone would play parlor games instead of *TFC* is beyond us.

Ubi Soft is working on a multiplayer version of its *Rayman 3D* platform series. Titled *Rayman M*, the game lets you play with three other people in the world originally created for *Rayman 2: The Great Escape*. Expect it on store shelves by Q4 2001.

The Station, Sony's online gaming site, has just announced that it's reached the 10-million-user mark. *EverQuest* is just one of the many games that people play via The Station, which will also be the home of the eagerly anticipated *Star Wars Galaxies*.



A mix of realistic and mythological units should put some nice twists in the *Age of Empires*–style gameplay.

A NEW AGE

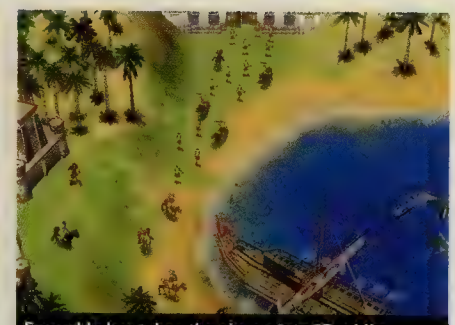
Bruce Shelley and Greg Street discuss *Age of Mythology*

Last issue we broke the news on *Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds*, a new RTS built on the *Age of Empires* engine. This month we talked to Ensemble Senior Designer Bruce Shelley and Designer Greg Street (from *Age of Conquerors*) about their next project following the *Age of Empires* series, and about their new 3D BANG engine.

PCG: Judging by your first screenshots, Age of Mythology seems to be fairly similar to Age of Empires.
GS: The gameplay should be very familiar to fans of *Age of Empires* or *Age of Kings*. Players can expect to gather resources, train military units, and even tribute allies or build Wonders. You'll be able to summon natural disasters upon your enemies, build temples to the various gods of your pantheon, or support your human army with mythological monsters.

PCG: Any word yet on the planned number of civilizations, units, campaigns, and so on?
GS: Parts of the tech trees have still to be defined. It's safe to say you'll be able to worship various gods in the Greek, Norse, or Egyptian pantheons. Unlike previous games in the *Age* series, nearly all of the units are specific to one culture. Only the Egyptians have Chariots, while only the Greek have Hoplites. A major departure for us is the campaign — there will be only one, which will allow us to tell a much longer, more dramatic story.

PCG: Age of Mythology was one of the original ideas for an Age of Kings add-on but was scrapped. Why did you go back to it?
GS: Mythology seems like a natural direction for us. With a pure fantasy or sci-fi genre, you have to learn entirely new relationships for units and civilizations. A mythological theme still lets us play with units such as catapults and cavalry that most players are instantly familiar with, while allowing us to add some more unusual, but still recognizable, units and abilities on top of the basic historical premise. Most of the mythological units in the game are soldiers that you can train similar to your human units. However, don't expect to see whole armies of minotaurs or giants. Instead, the myth units are expensive and fulfill particular roles in your army. In the same way that you used your Archers or Knights to protect your siege weapons in *Age of Kings*, you might have an army of Egyptian Archers or Chariots backed up by a Sphinx or two.



Ensemble has taken the plunge into 3D while retaining the look and style of the *Age* series.

PCG: When did you start development of the BANG engine?
BS: In 1997, right after completing the first *Age of Empires*. We started from scratch with the goal of building a very kick-butt 3D engine that could be used for a variety of game genres.

PCG: Will the animations look as crisp as the sprites in Age of Empires? Are there any specific gameplay improvements that you'll be able to do because you're using 3D?
GS: We weren't willing to go 3D until we could capture the artistic detail of *AoE* and *AoK*. With BANG that is now possible. The terrain is much more interesting now: instead of the discrete plateaus in *Age of Kings*, our maps can now provide canyons, narrow gorges, mountains, and river deltas. Because all of the units are 3D models, our artists are capable of making many more animations per unit. We can also do some great things with the camera for in-game cinematics.

— Heinrich Lenhardt

For a complete version of this interview, go to *www.pcgamer.com*.

>>THE PCG NEWS TICKER >>

>> Price drops have been announced for NVIDIA's line of GeForce-powered video cards. 32MB GeForce2 cards are expected to drop as low as $99, while the newer 64MB GeForce3 cards will hit the $399 price point.

>> Singapore Airlines plans to start an in-flight gaming service that will let passengers actually play multiplayer PC games on its aircraft by installing a server onto a 747. The server will also let passengers check email and surf pre-loaded web pages.

>> A new game called *Prisoner of War* has been announced by Codemasters. It's a third-person action/adventure in which you try to escape from a prison camp. Gameplay has a strong emphasis on stealth. *POW* is slated for a winter release.

>> The Cyberathelete Professional League 4-Year Anniversary Event has been delayed by one week. Why? College gamers in Canada complained that the gathering took place during their final exams. The event will occur in Dallas, June 28 to July 1.

LAN Party Report

PC Gamer Hits Up Gamerzday

Having a LAN party? Send Li (*lkuo@pcgamer.com*) the details and we may cover the event in a future issue.



Go to *www.gamerzday.com* for more info. (Inset) Gamerzday founders Darren Emerson and Matt Wilson.

Ever since Jeremy first showed up at *PC Gamer*, he's been handily creaming us at anything *Quake*-related. He just plain out-classed everyone here at *Quake III: Arena* and, with the exception of his recent loss to renowned *Quake* champ Kornelia, almost never sees defeat. All that changed when Chuck, Vederman, Jeremy, and Li went to the Gamerzday LAN party in Vacaville, Calif., on April 28. In a series of painful *Quake III: Rocket Arena* matches, Jeremy and Chuck were demolished repeatedly while 114 attendees looked on. Perhaps the most crushing defeat was when Chuck lost to a 12-year-old *Quake* player that was about one-fourth his size. Meanwhile, Li signed up for the *Counter-Strike* tournament and was about as helpful to his team as a bulletproof vest made of Tupperware. In the end, a good time was had by all and some hard lessons were learned by the *PCG* crew (none of which we'll remember, and we'll deny them if ever asked about 'em).

— Li C. Kuo



THE PCG PLAYLIST

Woo-hoo! As this issue went to press, we finally snagged new computers here at the *PC Gamer* offices! However, the distribution of power was evident in what our various staff members received. While Li was bumped up to a PIII 600, Rob got a 1GHz Pentium machine with the works. Alas, that's just the way the world works. (Not to worry — we've all got plans to steal the good components from Rob's machine the next time he's away on vacation.)



ROB *Day of Defeat.* I finally started playing, and wow, is this mod fun. And it's free? Get it from this month's *PC Gamer* CD and start playing — that's an order. Two cup-final losses (including the pinnacle European Champions League) means I'm still seeking *Championship Manager* greatness with the mighty Blades.



COREY I took a quick break from PC games this month and leapt into the Dreamcast driver's seat of *Crazy Taxi*, one of the most psychotically intense console games ever. While on vacation, I couldn't resist visiting an arcade in Barcelona, too, for a little *Silent Scope 2* and six-man *Galaxian 2000*. Ah, the ol' coin-op days...



DAN *Worms World Party* is the best of all/Fragging mad worms keeps me enthralled/I got no time for other games/Wack JoWooD titles just drive me insane/And I don't want to hear JoWooD reps scream/ Don't make me bust a cap in your PR team. Word, and we out. This is how we do it in the '01.



CHUCK Besides reviewing *Evil Dead* and *Time Traveler*, I've mostly been playing with my ever-growing collection of action figures. My miniature legion of DC superheroes surrounds me; I'm waiting for the day when a bolt of lightning strikes them, bounces off, hits me, and imbues me with superpowers.



LI Lately I've been scaring myself silly with *Undying* (using four-speaker EAX really bumps up the spooky factor). Also, I always make sure I take some time during the day to do my patriotic duty and kill some Nazis in the excellent *Half-Life* mod *Day of Defeat*. Of course, that Hill level is pretty frustrating...damn snipers.



JEREMY Big thanks to everyone for their kind sympathy regarding my humiliating defeat to Kornelia. I'm glad to say my training has been going extremely well — I'm back in top shape and looking forward to her accepting a rematch challenge. To steel my reflexes, I've been playing *Quake III* and nothing else.



JOE There's nothing like killing a few editors during our *Day of Defeat* LAN games at the *PC Gamer* office. Rob, dead. Li, dead. Jeremy, dead. Whew, now if I could get Vederman to play...I finally won the Stanley Cup in *NHL 2001*. The new updated rosters are great; download them from *http://nhldepot.nhlgaming.net*.



CHIAKI KILL 'EM ALL. That's my motto when it comes to war strategy. (It's also a damn good Metallica album! We miss you, Cliff!) What's up with helping your enemies get to your other enemies? I believe that once a scumbag, always a scumbag. There better be a reason for *StarCraft*'s scheming warfare, because it's pissing me off.



GREG When I haven't been messing with the new 1.7GHz system that Alienware just sent me, I've been playing *Black & White*. So far, I'm about halfway through the game as a "good" god. I'm thinking of starting over as a "bad" god because it better suits my nature.

HALF BLUE

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MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Blood and Gore Violence

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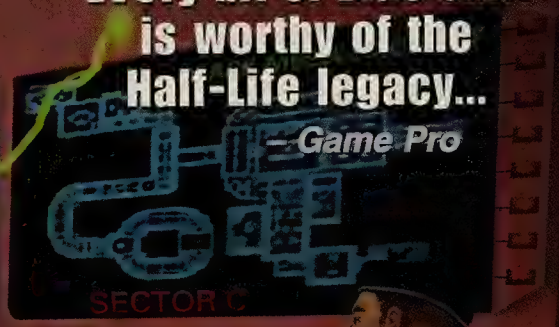
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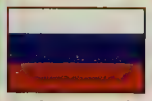
Available this June

Half-Life NOT required

GAMING GOE

THINK ALL THE GOOD PC GAMES ARE BEING MADE BY BLOODY FOREIGNERS? WELL, YOU

RUSSIA



The former Soviet Union has nurtured a thriving game-development community in recent years, and, yes, many of the games being made are reaching our fair shores. Moscow in particular is home to at least three developers — Akella, Nival Interactive, and New Media Generation — all with sights on U.S. stardom. Fresh from finishing the successful *Sea Dogs*, Akella already has a sequel in development, and Nival Interactive will be following up its release of *Evil Islands* with a turn-based 3D strategy game called *Etherlords* later this year.

New Media Generation is currently looking for a U.S. publisher for its *Quake III* look-alike *Hired Team: Trial*. (You can try it out by downloading the demo from *www.nmg.ru*.)

And who could forget the Kaliningrad-based developer that brought us *Vangers* [shudder]? Well, we tried, but K-D Lab is making more games anyway. Look for the cartoon rally game *Moonshine Runners* in Q3 2001 and the real-time strategy game *Perimeter* sometime in 2002.



BRAZIL



Nestled in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, Jack in the Box Computing is toiling away on a game so top-secret, they couldn't give us a hint what it's about. Their first project, the 3D action/strategy game *Aquarius*, was originally supposed to be released this year, but since Jack in the Box hasn't been able to find a publisher, the product's fate remains uncertain.



We're not sure what they're saying, but Thai PC gamers seem to like *Diablo II*.

AUSTRALIA



The Land Down Under is more than just a home for koala bears, shrimps on barbies, and suicidal crocodile hunters. No less than three PC game makers make the continent their home, including Brisbane's Auran, the developer of *Dark Reign*. Next up for Auran is *Trainz*, a model-train editor for railroad hobbyists, and the action/adventure game *Excalibur*. Both are set for release in the States once a U.S. publisher is found.

Blue Tongue, the company behind the game *Starship Troopers*, is settled in North Melbourne, and Ratbag, the developer of such racing games as *Dirt Track Racing* and *Powerslide*, is found to the south in Adelaide. Ratbag is busy at work on its newest racer, *Leadfoot*, set for a Q2 2001 release.





In Argentina, the Spanish-language version of *PCG* looks much like *PCXL* did.

S GL BAL

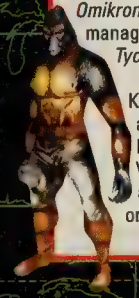
'RE RIGHT. WE UNCOVER THE INTERNATIONAL GAMING SCENE ONE COUNTRY AT A TIME.

FRANCE



Though we can't help but ridicule the faux snootiness of the French stereotype, France is a major player in PC gaming. Not only is it home to mega-publishers Infogrames and Cryo, but it has a healthy game-development scene, too. For example, the city of Paris alone is the home of Darkworks, Monte Cristo, and Quantic Dream. Darkworks is hopefully finishing development on the adventure/horror game *Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare*, and Quantic Dream is known for its adventure title *Omikron: The Nomad Soul*. Monte Cristo bills itself as "the management games company," making titles like *Political Tycoon* and the upcoming *Gadget Tycoon*.





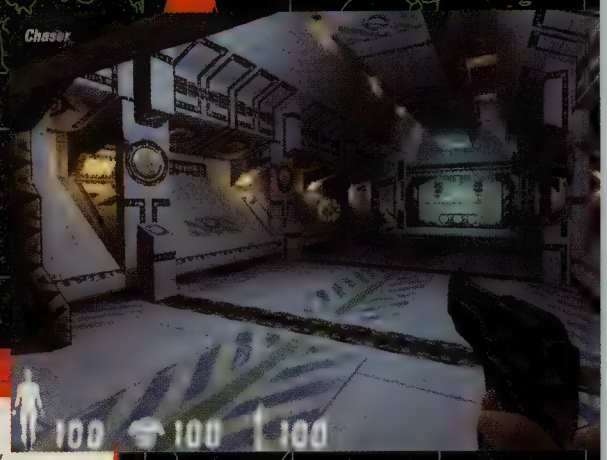
Other French developers are Bordeaux-based Kalisto, maker of oldies *Dark Earth* (worth finding in a bargain bin) and *Nightmare Creatures* and the host of a web gaming site, and Sevres-based Visiware, which is currently working on the much-anticipated *Planet of the Apes* game and the online-only episodic adventure game *Arabian Knights*.



The original *PC Gamer*, No. 1 in the UK, first hit newsstands in early '94.

SPAIN

Spain boasts two major developers, both in Madrid. Rebel Act Studios is working on a sequel to its fantasy action/adventure game *Blade of Darkness*, and is also developing an unnamed online-only game. Pyro Studios, the force behind *Commandos*, will be releasing the game's sequel sometime this summer, and is also working on a Roman-era strategy game called *Praetorians*.



SLOVAKIA

Residing in Bratislava, the capital of the Slovak Republic, Cauldron is the developer of *Battle Isle: The Androsia War*. Immediately after finishing that project, it began work on a new first-person shooter called *Chaser* that is powered by Cauldron's proprietary Cloak 3D engine. The team hasn't announced a U.S. publisher yet, but the screenshots we've seen make us hope they find one soon.

ONCE AROUND THE WORLD

ENGLAND



Black & White is a big hit over here, and it sums up our humour quite aptly in many ways.

THE TOP FIVE GAMES IN THE UK

1	Black & White
2	The Sims: House Party
3	Cossacks: European Wars
4	The Sims
5	Half-Life: Generation

SOURCE: ELSPA. STATS ARE FOR 4/22-4/28

"LAND OF HOPE AND GLORY... [something, something else]..." go the stirring words of a song that would make any Brit stand up proud. And possibly salute. Well, any English person anyhow. For the Welsh, you might have to start droning on about valleys and coal; the Scots, porridge and kilts; and the Irish, potatoes. Yes, we're one hell of a diverse splodge of polyglot, here off the coast of Europe...

And if there's one thing the UK can be said to have collectively (resistance is futile), it's a sense of humour [sic], and a somewhat bizarre one that our gaming reflects. We can laugh at ourselves, which is just as well, as we can join in with everyone else.

Are You Being Savaged?

The current No. 1 game in Britain, crafted lovingly by Peter Molyneux and his UK-based Lionhead crew, sums us up pretty accurately. It's the humour element more than anything else — *Black & White*, as well as being pure genius in terms of gaming, can make you stare in awe one moment and then have you in stitches with mirth the next. The first time you clout your creature to tell him off and accidentally knock his legs from underneath him, toppling him onto some unfortunate villager's hut and wrecking it...pure British slapstick! But the purest of all, of course, is our "toilet" humour. Watching the creature strain to have a crap, leaving a huge dump in an enemy settlement as a mark of disrespect for your opponent — that's pure Brit with a capital B.

Soccer is also extremely big over here: punters are in line at midnight to get their grubby mitts on the latest *Championship Manager* iteration. *The Sims* doing so well is a reflection of our nation's penchant for the soap opera — we have homegrown and Australian soaps crammed down our throats until we can taste the cardboard (traditionally associated with the acting).

Hating Nazis for Fun and Profit

UK gamers aren't particularly enamoured with the notion of political correctness. As the country that won WWII, for example, we took great delight in playing the very average *Mortyr* — Achtung tommy schwinehunt — and *Wolfenstein 3D*, and basically any game where you get to mow down Nazi scumbags by the dozen. TalonSoft's buggy *Hidden & Dangerous* sold in droves because of its WWII theme. Basil Fawlty said it best: "Don't mention the war!" We also love stuff with a "laddish" element to it — i.e., for the men. No, not porn, but footy games and "humorous" games where you shoot things and laugh. Ah-ha-ha-ha! Especially Nazis.

Online Impotence

Ooh, by 'eck, we're a frustrated lot online. Online gaming in the UK is quite big, but way behind the United States. Our Net infrastructure is lagging behind that of the U.S., and the rest of Europe for that matter, mainly because our cable companies are about as quick as dead tortoises, though not as useful. The main company, BT, is far too busy trying to extract money from the populace to actually improve its broadband services. Most of us still use 56K dialup service, and have to pay through the nose for it. This makes us bitter.

We also get online games after you lot — *Tribes 2* wasn't out here as of mid-April, for example, and the *EverQuest* expansion packs were shipped two weeks late, via Peru, to this country. Thanks, Sony! This makes us even more bitter and twisted, and fuels our potentially explosive temperaments, which seep out every now and then from behind that traditional, stoic British facade. Cue punchline: You lucky American bastards! You lucky, lucky bastards... [fades]

— Darren "Dazza" Allan


A *Rugby* scrum

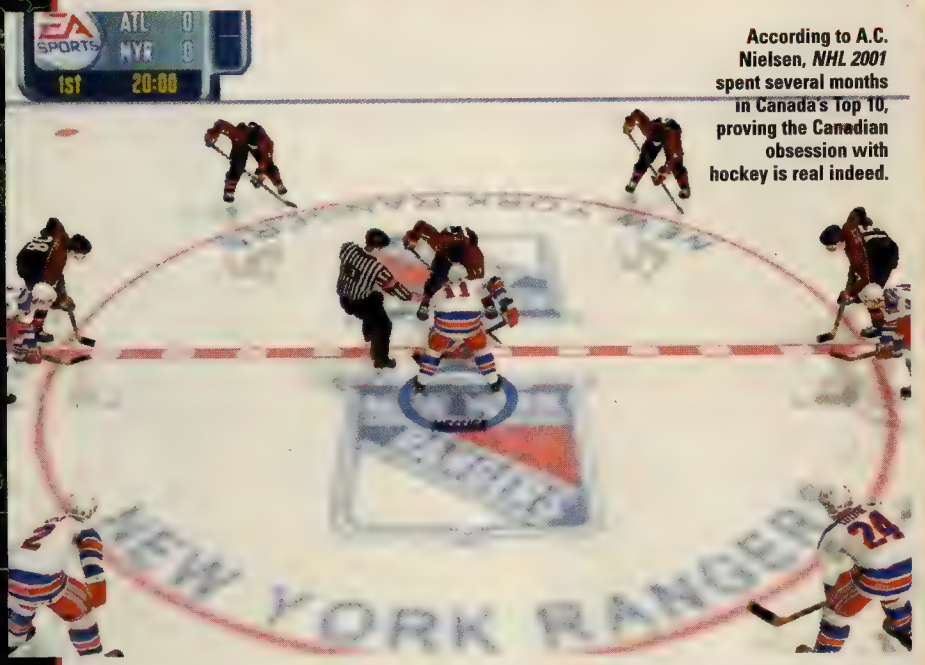
Cricket: Howzat?

If it's England, there has to be cricket, right? And tea and crumpets? Well, EA released *Cricket 2000* in the cricket-playing countries (though it's pretty awful, something the upcoming 2002 version will hopefully redress). And then there's rugby. The real sport of men — no pads here — is depicted in EA's *Rugby 2001*, a fairly realistic and hugely playable version of the famous game played by men with funny-shaped balls.

SCOTLAND

"If it's not Scottish, it's crap!" joked comedian Mike Meyers. Tell that to gamers who played Glasgow-based Red Lemon's buggy *Braveheart* game and found out it was crap anyway. Red Lemon is back to right old wrongs with a third-person action/adventure game based on the popular sci-fi television series *Farscape*. It'll be released in the U.S. in Summer 2002 by Simon & Schuster Interactive.

CANADA



According to A.C. Nielsen, *NHL 2001* spent several months in Canada's Top 10, proving the Canadian obsession with hockey is real indeed.

ALONG WITH HOCKEY PLAYERS, female singers, comedians, and beer, you can now rank computer games as one of Canada's hottest exports. Yep, dozens of companies in the Great White North are becoming worldwide players in the PC gaming biz. It's aboot time, eh?

Take Relic Entertainment, whose last game, *Homeworld*, won numerous awards and accolades in 1999, including the coveted *PC Gamer* Game of the Year award. Twenty-five-year-old CEO Alex Garden and his 50-person team at Relic are currently readying *Sigma*, a unique strategy game to be published by Microsoft, and *Homeworld II* for Sierra (both scheduled to ship in 2002).

Co-founded by doctors Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka in Edmonton, Alberta, is BioWare, the savvy developer responsible for the best-selling and critically acclaimed *Baldur's Gate*, as well as *MDK 2*, *Shattered Steel*, and the upcoming *Neverwinter Nights* and the first *Star Wars* CRPG in partnership with LucasArts.

Garden and Zeschuk agree that Canadians' wide exposure to cultural influences from both the U.S. and Europe might help them understand what different cultures find entertaining in their games.

"On a less serious note," says Zeschuk, "I believe Canadians make good game designers because of their exposure to long winters. The weather keeps people inside working on games rather than pursing silly outdoor interests!"

"And don't forget hockey and Canadian beer," adds Muzyka. "I think those may have something to do with the Canadian competitive advantage in game design as well."

James Schmalz is the owner and lead designer of London, Ontario's Digital Extremes, the co-developer of *Unreal*, *Unreal Tournament*, and *Dark Sector*, a massively multiplayer first-person shooter DE's currently working on. He believes Canadian game designers are so sought-after because "we have some excellent universities that produce world-class programmers, as well as some outstanding art colleges."

Oh, and have you ever heard of little ol' game series such as *FIFA*, *NBA Live*, *Need for Speed*, *Triple Play*, and *SSX*? Sure you have. All of them were created at Electronic Arts Canada, located in Burnaby, British Columbia. Though Canadian gaming tastes don't differ much from those of our non-Canuck neighbors to the south, hockey games like EA's *NHL 2001* sell much better here than they do in the U.S.

Many other savvy Canadian game developers are making a name for themselves on the international gaming scene. A few of the companies with games currently in development are Barking Dog Studios in Vancouver (*Global Operations*), Sir-Tech in Ottawa (*Wizardry 8*), Strategy First in Montreal (*Disciples II: Dark Prophecy*, *O.R.B.*), and Ubi Soft in Montreal (*Speed Devils Online*).

— Marc Saltzman

THE TOP FIVE GAMES IN CANADA

1	The Sims
2	RollerCoaster Tycoon
3	Diablo II
4	Sim City 3000
5	Unreal Tournament

SOURCE: A.C. NIELSEN · STATS ARE FOR FEBRUARY 2001

SWEDEN

Though we couldn't imagine getting any work done ourselves if we lived in Sweden (leggy blondes, The Swedish Chef), the country that gave us vikings is a hotbed of game development, both big and small. The founders of The Other Guys (yes, that's the company name) in Harnosand worked for one of Europe's largest defense contractors developing real-life command systems for the Swedish military before starting their own game company. They're currently looking for a publisher for their first game, *Sidescene*.

Daydream Software, out of Umea, Sweden, won't have that problem with its new snowmobile racing game, *Ski-Doo X-Team Racing*, as it's recently been picked up by publisher Simon & Schuster Interactive for an August 2001 release in the U.S.

Stockholm-based Paradox Entertainment, which is probably best-known for *Europa Universalis* in the U.S., is developing *Warzone Online*, an online-only 3D RTS battle game based on the Warzone tabletop miniatures game.

MindArk in Goteborg, Sweden, is developing *Project Entropia*, a massively multiplayer RPG that lets you purchase in-game items with real money — and even make a profit if you're a good player. And SouthEnd Interactive, based in Malmo, is readying its first-person arena combat game, *Blitz-Disc Arena*, for release "when it's done."



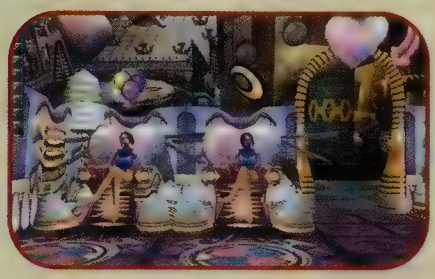
FINLAND

When you imagine cutting-edge 3D visuals and a ballet of *Matrix*-style shimmering ballistics, it's safe to say that you're probably not thinking about Finland. But that's just where you'll find Remedy, the developer of the soon-to-be-unleashed shooter *Max Payne*. Located in the city of Espoo, the Remedy staff braves unforgivably bone-chilling winters (as one *PC Gamer* editor recently found out) to make sizzling-hot perfection.



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GERMANY



No, it's not *Sim Pretty European Village*, but it's still the best-selling game in German history.

THE TOP FIVE GAMES IN GERMANY

SOURCE: GFK. STATS ARE FOR 4/7–4/22

1. Black & White
2. Die Sims — Party Ohne Ende
3. Sudden Strike Forever
4. Wer Wird Millionär?
5. Die Siedler IV (The Settlers IV)

WHAT'S THE BEST-SELLING PC game in German history (excluding budget software)? Forget *Half-Life* and *The Sims*; that honor belongs to *Anno 1602*. This cuddly *SimCity*-type colonization game — which earned little more than a few yawns when GT Interactive published it under the name *1602 A.D.* in the U.S. — sold around 1 million copies in German-language countries. It's the perfect example of a winning formula in the German market: strategy games with a strong building aspect mixed with economic and resource management, and global domination. Blue Byte's *Settlers* series hit a similar nerve: every new installment ends up at the top of the German sales charts.

Like most Europeans, Germans share a healthy obsession with the beautiful game of soccer. EA Sports' annual *FIFA* updates are guaranteed chart-toppers, while, by comparison, NFL football titles such as *Madden* don't do nearly as well. We also have our share of soccer-management programs like Ascaron's *Anstoss*, whose third installment stormed the German sales charts in 2000.

For the most part, first-person shooters don't sell as well in Germany as they do in the U.S. RPGs, on the other hand, are second in popularity only to strategy games, with *Baldur's Gate* and *Icewind Dale* generating high sales. There's also a respectable adventure-games market: if it wasn't for the sales figures in Germany, LucasArts probably wouldn't have bothered doing another *Monkey Island* game last fall.

Wilkommen to the Jungle, We've Got (censored) Fun and Games...

An infamous national oddity of gaming in Germany is the practice of "banning" certain titles with violent content, based on a federal youth-protection law. If any media is considered dangerous for minors by the Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Schriftenit ("the federal inspection office for writings that endanger minors"), it can end up on an index called "Liste der jugendgefährdenden Schriften" ("list of writings that endanger youths"). The idea behind the law is to prevent kids' access to pornographic material, extremely violent movies, and the like, which might damage their fragile, innocent minds.

An annoying side effect is that banned games can't be openly displayed in retail outlets. It's not illegal for an adult to buy or own one, but a listed game can be nearly impossible to find since most retail stores stop distributing a game as soon as it ends up on the index. Mail-order dealers (which require a copy of the buyer's ID) are usually the last resort.

Even advertising and certain forms of editorial coverage are forbidden for banned games. The staff of *PC Gamer*'s German sister magazine, *PC Player*, is not allowed to write a positive review about this kind of game (German lawmakers consider it a form of "advertising"). Disturbing, considering that a law designed to protect youth ends up limiting freedom of speech.

To keep their games off "the list," German distributors modify imported games to appear less violent by replacing human characters with robots or extraterrestrials. Infantry units in *C&C* were referred to as "robots," and let out a metallic scrunch when driven over by a tank. The German version of *Half-Life* edited out red blood and gave human character models a more cyborg-like appearance.

It's even possible for a game to be banned completely. Any game related to World War II is a touchy subject, as displaying Nazi symbols is illegal. For example, Electronic Arts will have to make many changes to its upcoming *Medal of Honor* (which prominently displays swastikas and other Nazi icons) to avoid legal troubles in Germany.

Boobies: 1, Violence: 0

While game violence is taken even more seriously than it is in the U.S., Germany is much more liberal when it comes to nudity. Interplay's *Giants* shipped with a bare-breasted Delphi character — a sight U.S. gamers were protected from by an odd bikini-top texture. Germany might be a bad place to find an unedited version of the latest gory 3D shooter, but you can certainly pick up soft-porn "games" such as the porn-movie-industry simulator *Wet*.

— Heinrich Lenhardt

WHAT IS THE BUNDESPRÜFSTELLE?

This office is a division of the federal ministry for families, seniors, and youths. After receiving a written request from a concerned institution explaining why a game should be banned for minors, the Bundesprüfstelle reviews the game and may (or may not) decide to ban it. A representative of the game's publisher has a chance to present a defense of the game's merits, much like a trial. The gamemaker and the condemning organization present their arguments to 12 members of the Bundesprüfstelle, who act as judges and jury. Banning a game requires a two-thirds majority vote.

The whole procedure can take weeks, resulting in games being banned *after* they've been released. That's why sequels to banned games, like *Quake III*, are often banned "in advance" of being reviewed by the Bundesprüfstelle.



Invasion Deutschland is a quirky (if dreadful) FPS in which players defend German monuments.

JAPAN



Japan's *Kanon* series of soft-porn games makes mainstream entertainment out of showing off women's naughty bits. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

CONSOLES ARE KING IN JAPAN. Given that this country's the home of Nintendo, Sega, and Sony, its console favoritism almost goes without saying, but what is often underestimated is the powerful "games are for consoles" mentality that persists here. "There are only a handful of successful Japanese developers in the PC market," laments Junji Shoda, director of the PC division at Electronic Arts Square K.K. (EA's Japanese subsidiary). Some companies, such as Konami, have attempted to tackle the shortage by running a dedicated college for fledgling PC game makers, but prospects for the future remain dismal.

Game publishers are content to localize imports for Japanese consumption (providing a Japanese-language manual, for instance). A recent tour of Tokyo revealed that only games like *Undying*, *Alice*, and *Hitman* were displayed prominently, and, even then, with only five to 10 copies of each in stock. There is immense pressure to perform: if it doesn't sell, and quickly, it's out. Sales of 5,000 units is considered very good for a PC game — and 10,000 units sold is seen as a runaway success.



Female characters keep their clothes on in *Kanon* games... at least for a little while.

Japanese-developed games tend to be console ports, like the girly game *Sakura Taisen 2* or the popular bargain title *Mr. Driller* (available for 2,680 yen, about $21). "We see some publishers who are specialized in budget titles that are attractive to these light home users. They have created a new market in recent years," says Shoda-san.

Extreme Simulation

The situation is not helped by the fact that a high percentage of PC gaming sales are for porn games. Nothing gets your average salaryman off like a spot of virtual lovin', and accordingly, there is a vast selection of Manga- and anime (cartoon)-based pornography available, from comics to video CDs, trading cards to PC games. A quick tour of the multitudinous porn-only software stores in Akihabara reveals that most of the best-selling PC titles are of the virtual-sex variety (two of them from the *Kanon* digital-figure series).

Internet penetration (sorry) is still low in Japan due to the high cost of online connections, but as more and more ISPs offer high-bandwidth ADSL access, thrill seekers may satiate their needs online. But not necessarily, says EA's Shoda-san: "While we do only a fraction of PC game business in Japan against EA's worldwide business, over 25 percent of *Ultima Online* business is done in Japan. Out of 240,000 current *UO* users, 64,000 are Japanese. Even though it is very costly [for Japanese gamers, they] still choose to play *UO*, *Diablo II*, and *EverQuest*."

— *Max Everingham*

POLAND

Metropolis Software of Lubin, Poland, may best be remembered in the U.S. for its strategy/RPG title *Odium* (published by Monolith in the U.S., and called *Gorky 17* in Europe). Staying true to form, the studio has two new roleplaying strategy games on the way: *Two Worlds*, a sci-fi experience set in the far future, and *Archangel*, a horror/fantasy thriller.

Warsaw's Mirage Interactive may not have exactly wowed us with its first-person Nazi-shooter *Mortyr*, but it may have a winner with its upcoming RPG about life in WWII-torn Europe called *Another War*. No word yet on whether it'll be released in the U.S., but it has a release date of December 2001 in Europe.



ITALY

Probably most famous in the U.S. for its adventure game *Ark of Time*, Trecision — located in Rapallo, Italy — is currently working on another 3D adventure, *The Watchmaker*, in which a lawyer and a paranormal examiner must join forces to save the world from catastrophe. Trecision is the largest game developer in Italy.



The Watchmaker

CROATIA

PLAY THE DEMO ON THE PCG CD

Though it now has its own office in Zagreb, Croatia, Croteam began life as a "garage game developer" mostly making games for the Amiga market in Europe. But after finishing their college careers, followed by brief stints in the Croation military, the development team finally finished the PC game that they started working on as a hobby — *Serious Sam*. Now *everybody* takes them seriously.

SOUTH KOREA



Korean-developed *Lineage: The Bloodpledge* should be available in the U.S. by the time you read this. Go to *www.lineagethebloodpledge.com* for details on how to sign up.

WHILE CONSOLE FREAKS idolize Japan as the One True Gaming Mecca, hardcore PC owners need only take a puddle-jump from Tokyo to Korea — a land where PC gaming has hit critical mainstream mass.

PC games have always had a following in the Korean crowd — but the country's game culture exploded in 1998, when "PC Rooms," or game-ready Internet cafés, became wildly popular with teens. Pop into one of over 20,000 PC Rooms in Korea, set up an account, and game the evening away for a cut-rate fee. Korea is wired with 4 million (and growing) ADSL connections, and broadband is truly in the hands of the masses.

The StarCraft Phenomenon

First-person shooters suck up the majority of U.S. bandwidth, but Korean gamers lean toward real-time strategy. Here's a statistic about the RTS's popularity in East Asia: of the 4 million copies of *StarCraft* sold worldwide, *half* of those were sold in Korea. *Age of Empires II* also has a mega-devoted fanbase, and the queues have already begun forming for *WarCraft III*.

PC game development has quickly caught on as the government has helped support homegrown talent to keep the big bucks from game sales within the country's borders. Korea has roughly 1,000 independent design houses. The most popular Korean-developed title is *Lineage: The Bloodpledge*, a massively multiplayer online RPG with a subscriber base of *2 million people*. As a point of reference, the population of Korea is 45 million, with roughly one-fourth of them accessing the Net on a regular basis.

And no write-up on the Korean gaming scene would be complete without a mention of the country's pro-gaming phenomenon. Sponsored by Samsung and organized by the BattleTop group, the annual World Cyber Games draws visitors from over a dozen countries to compete in *Quake III*, *StarCraft*, and *FIFA*. "E-Sports" is taken very seriously here — over 100,000 spectators showed up to view the 2000 Cyber Games Finals, and the best players can receive scholarships to game-design universities.

High-Level Support

While some U.S. officials admonish the game industry as a breeding ground for serial killers, the Korean government is happy to support the growing business. Minister of Culture and Tourism Han-Gill Kim was appointed as the co-chairman of the World Cyber Games Organizing Committee, and other high-ranking government officials have been known to give speeches at Korean gaming events and trade shows.

Just remember to check your PS2 at the door — the government frowns on the import of Japanese hardware, and a desktop PC is the only way to play. Sounds like a fair trade to us.

— Colin Williamson

THE TOP FIVE GAMES IN KOREA

1. Diablo II
2. White Dog with White Heart
3. Cookie Shop
4. StarCraft
5. Acturus

SOURCE: BATTLETOP. STATS ARE FOR MARCH 2001

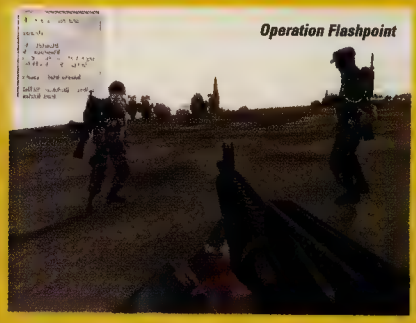
CZECH REPUBLIC

If it seems like most of the games to come out of the former Czechoslovakia are war games, well, who can blame you? Bohemia Interactive's *Operation Flashpoint* is a first-person military tactical combat simulation, yet you might be surprised to learn that the developer's other recent game, unreleased in the U.S., is a sweet adventure game devoted to Russian fairy tales called, naturally, *Fairytale*.

Another major Czech developer, Illusion Softworks, is readying a sequel to its hit squad-based tactical game *Hidden & Dangerous*, as well as the '30s mob action title *Mafia*.



Hidden & Dangerous 2



Operation Flashpoint

NORWAY

With around 70 percent of the Norwegian population wired for Internet access, it's not unusual that a Scandinavian company would want to explore the potential of online gaming. Known in the U.S. for its critically acclaimed adventure game *The Longest Journey*, Oslo-based Funcom (the largest gaming company in Norway) is getting ready to make the jump to massively multiplayer gaming with *Anarchy Online*. The futuristic role-playing game is due in the U.S. this summer.

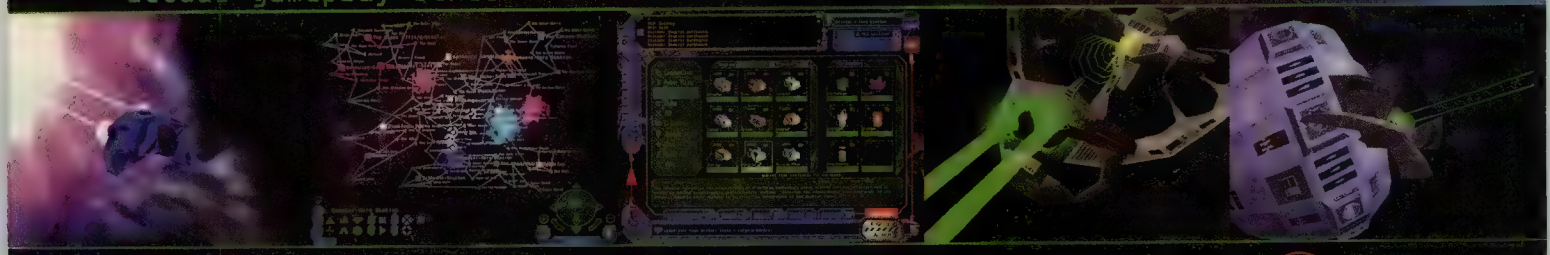


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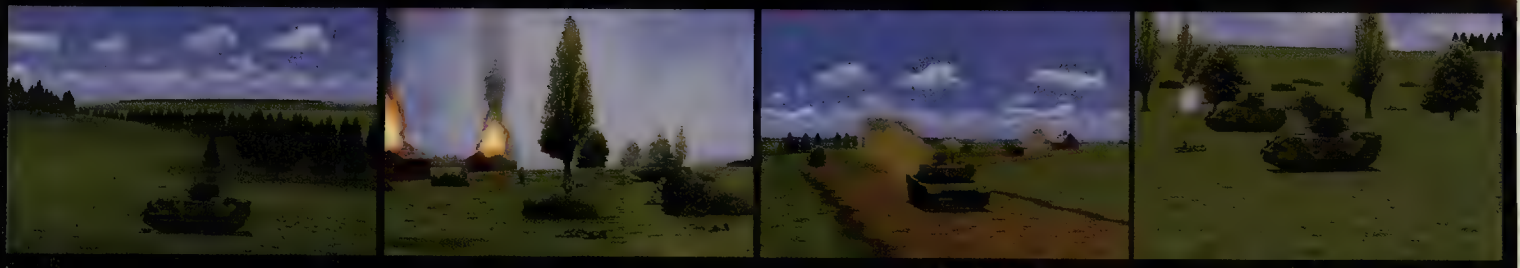
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- PC Gamer -

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Sometimes They Come Back

As longtime readers of *PC Gamer* may recall, our beloved office hamster perished almost two years ago. Hamuel the Hamster (a.k.a. Hammy) was buried in a somber ceremony held in our parking lot, and was laid to eternal rest beneath some hedges.

Recently, we headed back out to that hallowed hedge to pay Hammy the ultimate respect — digging him up and seeing what he looked like now. Off we set to pull up the *PC Gamer* tin that had been Hammy's coffin.

We were unprepared for the jolting shock that awaited us.



A hole. In the ground. The last known resting place of Hammy. May the fates protect us.

Solemnly we assembled around the grave marker (okay, it wasn't that solemn — we were eager to see Hammy's skeleton). But we were in for a mind-boggling surprise. As Li commenced the shoveling, using a spatula from the kitchen to breach that sacred soil, our breaths were held in collective anticipation.

But there was no tin to be found.

We stood aghast in horror and fascination. The grave had been clearly marked; we knew we had the right spot. And yet here we were, face to face for the first time in history with something commensurate to our capacity for induced group vomiting.

It was then that we heard a sobering voice from behind us, and turned to see a wizened, elderly hobo leaning against our building. "That right there is the one spot in this parking lot that you should never have buried a hamster in," he groaned. "Never. *Never.*"

Hammy, if your resurrected undead carcass is out there somewhere, wandering the underbrush and contemplating its revenge, we have only one thing to say: It was *Jeremy's* idea to bury you out there! Take him first!

NEW AND IMPROVED RATING SYSTEM

Only the greatest games should be rewarded with our coveted Editors' Choice award, and this tweak to the rating system reflects that. Now, with a quick glance at the score box on each page, you can see where the game fits into the great gaming scheme of quality.

100%–90% EDITORS' CHOICE

We're battening down the hatches and limiting our coveted Editors' Choice award to games that score a 90% or higher. It's not easy to get here, and darn near impossible to get near 100%. Games in this range come with our unqualified recommendation, an unreserved must-buy score.

89%–80% EXCELLENT

These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your purchase, and is likely a great example of its genre. This is also a scoring range where we might reward specialist/niche games that are real breakthroughs in their own way.

79%–70% GOOD

These are pretty good games that we'd recommend to fans of the particular genre, though it's a safe bet you can probably find better options.

69%–60% ABOVE AVERAGE

Reasonable, above-average games. They might be worth buying, but they probably have a few significant flaws that limit their appeal.

59%–50% MERELY OKAY

Very ordinary games. They're not completely worthless, but there are likely numerous better places to spend your gaming dollar.

49%–40% TOLERABLE

Poor quality. Only a few slightly redeeming features keep these games from falling into the abyss of the next category.

39%–0% DON'T BOTHER

Just terrible. And the lower you go, the more worthless you get. Avoid these titles like the plague, and don't say we didn't warn you!

HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS With each *PC Gamer* review in this issue, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the *least* you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll *really* need.

SHAME OF THE MONTH



Ah, crap games. Though we shudder every time we see those wretched titles that denigrate the industry, we do love to hate 'em. And yet, when we score the damnable lot that earn our much-dreaded "Don't Bother" rating, it takes a special breed of turd to merit a sub-10% score. Shun these pariahs — they herald doom, and disgust, and heaps of unintentional laughter. Just like Vederman every time he visits the bathroom.

TIME TRAVELER



p.74

EXCELLENT CORNER

They didn't quite earn our prized Editors' Choice award, but these games are among those certified Excellent by our trusted reviewers.

MYST III: EXILE



p.62

The juggernaut of commercial success is likely to keep rumbling onward as *Myst III* delivers exactly what the series' fans expect

SUMMONER



p.65

After this RPG's disappointing debut on the PlayStation 2, THQ gets a lot of things right in the new PC version.

CATEGORY	Strategy	REQUIRED	P200, 32MB RAM, 820MB HD
DEVELOPER	Pop Top Software	WE RECOMMEND	PIII 500, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
PUBLISHER	G.O.D.	MAXIMUM PLAYERS	1

Tropico

Rule an island paradise, and get grim satisfaction from crushing opposition beneath your boot-heel.



A coup is crushed beneath the heel of Billy's elite stormtroopers.

I must admit, right off the bat — I am a sick and twisted sumbitch. I dream of conquering the world and forcing the unwashed masses to follow my every decree, no matter how depraved or insane it may be. And that's why I was so excited about *Tropico*, the new strategy game from Pop Top Software (the folks who brought us the excellent *Railroad Tycoon II*) that casts you as the dictator of a small Caribbean island. Here at last was the chance to fulfill all those twisted ambitions and carry out horrible acts of retribution on my enemies. Alas for me, while *Tropico* does deliver a good strategy game, it fails to fully realize its warped potential.

The game's premise is pure gold. The year is 1950, the Cold War is raging, and you're the recently installed dictator of a Caribbean island firmly in the pocket of the U.S.S.R.

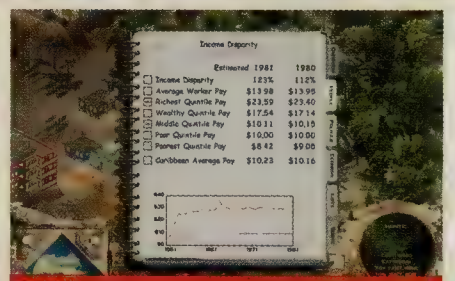
Tropico offers two basic types of gameplay: you can play one of the game's ready-made scenarios, or you can play an open-ended game that goes on as long as you wish — or at least as long as you can maintain power. If you choose the latter, you generate your Caribbean paradise by determining the amount of vegetation on the island, how much water is present, and other factors that affect the game's difficulty. (For example, if your island is arid, you'll face a much bigger challenge in keeping your population healthy and happy.)

Once your island is ready, you create your alter ego. You choose a background — guerrilla, student, and so on — how you came into power, and your strengths and weaknesses. (I made sure to select compulsive womanizing *[proving it's fiction — Ed.]*.) All of these choices directly impact how various factions in the game respond to you and how well (or poorly) you'll get along with them. For instance, if your background is as a leftist author, you'll enjoy a bonus with the intellectuals on the island, but other factions, like the religious folks, will view you with suspicion. All of this information is conveyed clearly before the game starts, which is a great way of customizing the game to match your gameplay style.

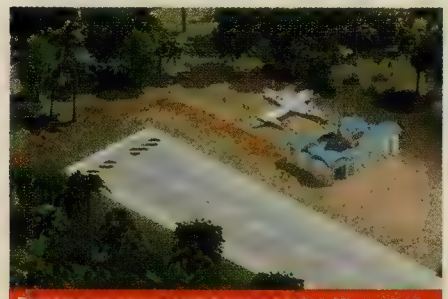
The bulk of the game is spent building up your economy by growing cash crops, nurturing industries like logging and cigar manufacturing, and enticing tourists to come visit your tropical paradise. In addition, various factions will demand things like churches and schools, and you'll need to make sure the leaders of those groups



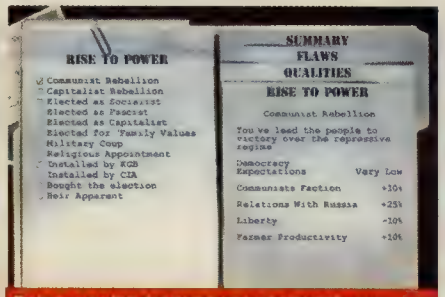
One scenario has you assuming power after a devastating earthquake. Best of luck!



Tropico's menus are long on graphs but short on actual game-altering options.



Building an airport will bring a higher class of tourist to your island.



Before starting the game you can tweak your character however you see fit.



If political opponents get a bit too frisky, you can always have the death squad take care of them.

are in line with your objectives by either giving in to their demands or bribing them until they're happy.

Other cool gameplay features include diplomatic options that impact your relationship with both Moscow and Washington, D.C. You can praise either country, send trade delegations, or, if your relationship is strong enough, ask them to build a military base on your island. All of these actions have both positive and negative ramifications, so you'll want to weigh your choices carefully. For instance, if you let Russia build a military base on your territory, you'll get monetary benefits, but if you piss them off they'll waste no time in forcibly removing you from power. These aspects of the game help create an experience that mirrors *SimCity*'s addictive "just one more turn" style of gaming, and will keep you busy for hours on end.



The game's graphics perfectly capture its Caribbean setting.

Yet unlike *SimCity* — in which your position of authority is never truly threatened — *Tropico* is filled with folks just itching to knock you out of power. Rebels will attack your farms, the military will stage a coup, and you'll be faced with an election every few years. It's these elements that looked to truly set *Tropico* apart from other games in this genre.

But this potential goes only halfway — people will rise up against you, but you can't suppress them to a point where they learn a lesson. And this is very disappointing.

You can gun someone down in the street or have their ass thrown in the slammer, but those actions very rarely offer any real benefit. In one situation, I was faced with an election that I would most certainly lose — even if I tried to rig it — so I assassinated the person who was running against me. He was promptly replaced by a different candidate...and I had him snuffed, too. Someone else stepped up to the political podium, they pulled a Jimmy Hoffa, and on and on it went. You'd think that after the first five candidates were gunned down, everyone else would catch a clue and not run against me. Alas, that wasn't the case, and I lost the election and the game.



To build a new structure, simply click on the build tab and then put the object where you want your workers to construct it.

Another example of this problem involves the martial-law edict. You'd think that this show of power would be an accurate reflection of the real thing — army toughs wandering the streets removing any potential problems, and ensuring that no one interferes with the actions of the state. Not so in *Tropico*. If you're faced with losing an election and choose to declare martial law, the election *still takes place* and you'll be voted out of office.

Making matters worse is an interface that makes carrying out some of these tasks truly frustrating. Let's say you want to arrest the leader of the religious faction. You'll need to click through two screens to locate him or her, highlight them, and then pause the game while you click through yet another menu and give the order to have them arrested. A much simpler option would be to have one menu option that brings up the faction leaders, complete with orders that can be carried out from that same screen.

There's no option to set a specific tax rate (just an option to reduce taxes), and there is no way to see the unemployment rate or even a simple option that shows you which industries need more workers. As a result, you're forced to micromanage nearly every financial aspect of the game.

On many levels, *Tropico* delivers a fun and compelling experience that will appeal to anyone who enjoys the *SimCity* games. However, in too many instances the folks at Pop Top took the easy way out, and in the process watered down what could have been a new hallmark in the annals of strategy gaming. Instead of giving us *SimDictator*, they gave us *SimCity Caribbean*.

— William Harms

FINAL VERDICT

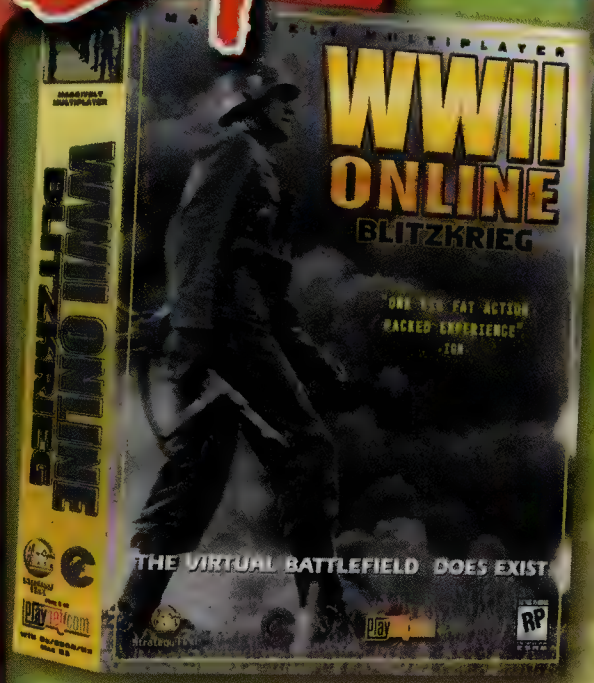
HIGHS: Decent strategy elements; great subject matter; good graphics.

LOWS: Lacks key menu options; unwieldy interface; evil measures sometimes ineffective.

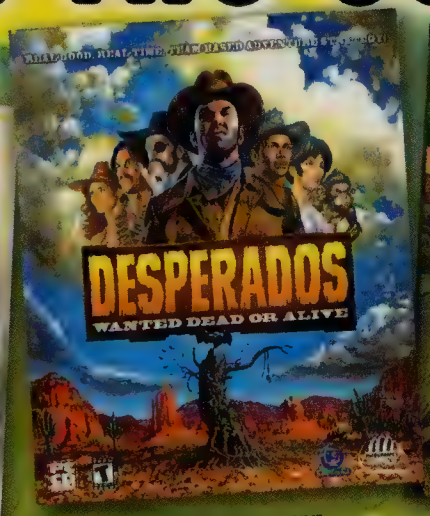
BOTTOM LINE: *Tropico* passes as a strategy game — just don't expect it to rock your world.

PC GAMER 77%
GOOD

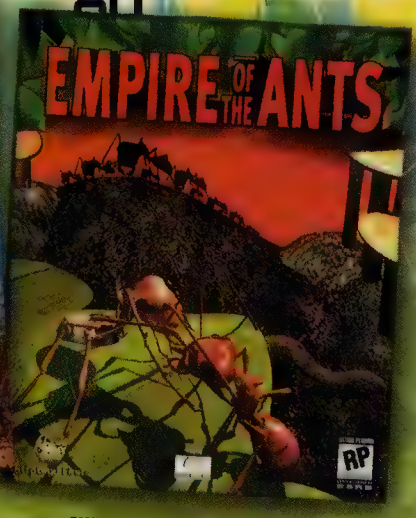
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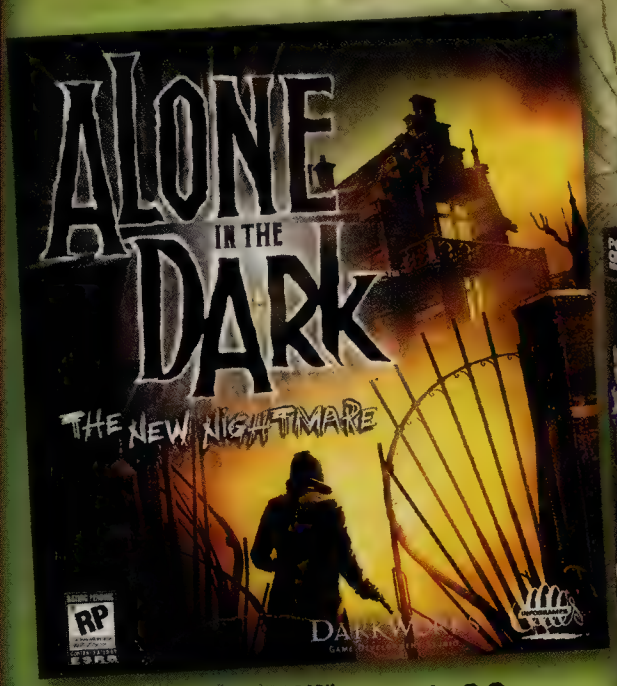
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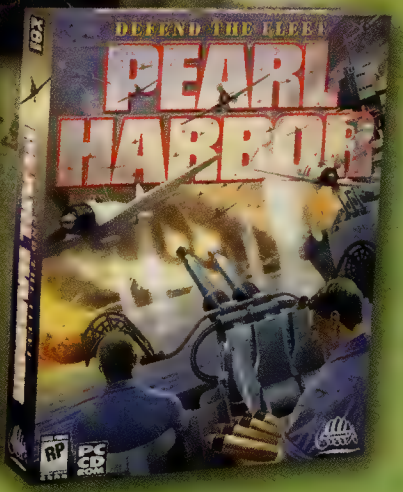
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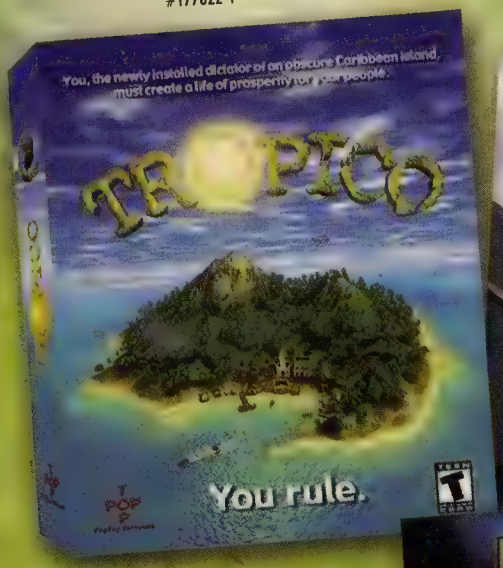
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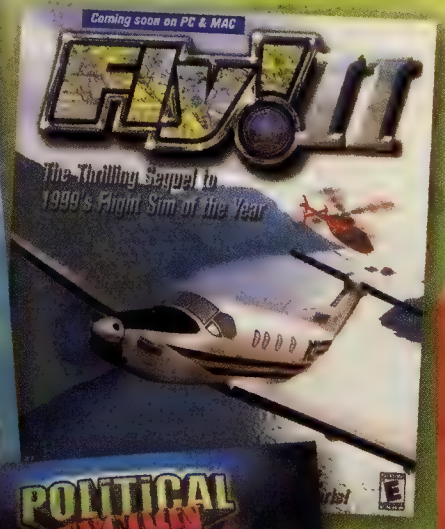
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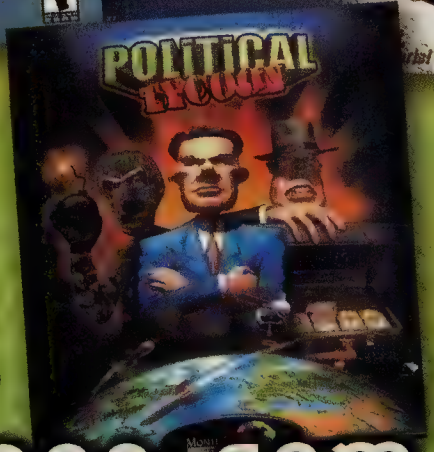
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GENRE	Adventure	REQUIRED	P233, 64MB RAM, 250MB HD
DEVELOPER	Presto Studios	WE RECOMMEND	PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 8MB video card
PUBLISHER	Ubi Soft	MAXIMUM PLAYERS	1

Myst III: Exile

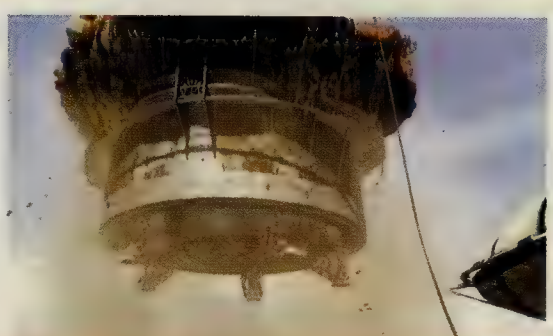
After a disappointing sequel, the third installment in the *Myst* series is definitely a step in the right direction.

If there's one game in the PC's glorious history that baffles hardcore critics, it's *Myst*. It came out of nowhere in 1994, caught the bleeding edge of mainstream attention pointed at this new fangled "multimedia" medium, and went on to be the best-selling game of all time. Critics and hardcore game players universally panned it as a slide-show that had little actual gameplay interaction. (Except *PC Gamer*, whose Editors' Choice award has been a continuing source of embarrassment to several generations of staffers.)

But the mainstream world agreed with our assessment, obviously, and *Myst* will go down in history as one of the games that helped introduce the concept of using a business machine for fun to thousands of mass-market computer users.

The sequel, *Riven*, was also a top-seller, but wasn't nearly as revered by casual gamers. It was still a slide-show affair with lots of pointing and clicking, but the *extremely* difficult puzzles made it frustrating for everybody, no matter what their game-playing experience.

In this third installment, Presto Studios — taking over for Cyan, the developer of the other two games — has taken everything that was good about *Myst* and created an adventure game that will suck in quite a few more mass-market players. (Its marketing campaign includes movie-theater trailer buys, no less.) But be warned — if you hated *Myst*, you'll most likely hate this one, too.



Exile's FMV sequences are seamless, and add tremendously to the game — especially when they're unexpected.

The story picks up after the events in *Myst*, *Riven*, and the *Myst*-based novels (*The Book of Atrus*, *The Book of Ti'ana*, and *The Book of D'ni*). Atrus, the beleaguered Age-writer from the previous games, welcomes you, the player, to the Age of Tomahna, where he's currently working on a new Age for the D'ni, a race of people whose world was destroyed in the novels. They're the folks who figured out how to write Ages in books in the first place.

You enter the fray when some stranger bursts into Atrus' study, grabs his new Age (Releeshahn), and disappears. Now it's your turn to chase after the villain. You eventually find out that Atrus' two sons, Sirrus and Achenar (two characters from *Myst*), destroyed the fellow's homeworld, and he's bent on revenge. You then have to make your way through several different Ages in a quest to stop him, recover Releeshahn, and figure out just what's going on.

The biggest improvement over the previous *Myst* games is the full 360-degree view of the environment. Rather than display a single postcard, the game lets you move the camera around and examine your surroundings as if you're standing within them. At first, however, it feels like you're stuck in a sphere, with a curved pic-



Presto did a great job keeping everything in perspective in relation to the player's location.



If the locations weren't so outrageous, these scenes would look like a tourist's photograph.



Brad Dourif does an excellent job as a bitter man whose homeworld is destroyed by Atrus' sons.

ture stretched on the walls all around you (think full-screen QuickTime VR), so you'll have to get over some initial nausea.

After a while, though, the slight warping is hardly noticeable, with the surround view helping imbue the immersive feel of the game — it's always good to at least *feel* like you can look around a corner, even if you can't. It's still disappointing, however, that even with today's technology it's impossible to render *Myst* scenes that you can actually wander around. (Although *realMyst*, last year's real-time remake of *Myst*, tried unsuccessfully to do just that.)

The incredibly detailed screens more than make up for the lack of movement. In some scenes, hundreds of leaves on trees are rendered individually, and in others, the textures are so realistic it seems as though you can touch the monitor and feel cold rock. Some of this stuff looks like photographs of real, if bizarre, places.

Presto even managed to get rid of the annoying box that appeared around FMV scenes in previous games, and full-scene FMV blends seamlessly with the pre-rendered backgrounds. It's a beautiful effect, and a far cry from *Myst*'s tiny windows of blurry video. For those with 3D accelerator cards, the game makes use of their polygon-pushing power to improve performance and add some snazzy effects — although those with Voodoo-based 3dfx cards are out of luck, since they aren't supported.

The real test of a game like *Exile* is the puzzles. If they're too hard or nonsensical, you'll get frustrated. If they're too easy, you'll be bored. Goldilocks would be happy with *Myst III: Exile* — the puzzles are just right. While some might be a breeze for hardcore gamers, others will leave them stumped. It all evens out into strong adventure gameplay.

Certain puzzles require an attention to details from previous areas, while others simply require mechanical or spatial thinking. The puzzles are hard enough to make you think, but not so impossible that you *have* to resort to a hint book to get past them.

Each of the Ages contains puzzles that relate to the nature of the Age, and very few of them are completely arbitrary — most times, the puzzle fits in to the concept of the game, rather than the whim of the designer. And unlike *Riven*, doing something on one side of an island doesn't affect something on the far side. It's all about instant gratification, and very rarely will you have to leave the immediate area in order to get past an obstacle.

There are plenty of visual payoffs for solving certain puzzles (*especially* the ride you get at the end of Amateria), and the acting — both by *Myst*-creator Rand Miller as Atrus and Brad Dourif (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Dune*) as the slightly insane antagonist — is top-notch.

Keep in mind, the game is still very much a *Myst* game at its core — a pretty slide show with logic puzzles. Many people who really tried to play *Myst* found it about as entertaining as watching a sloth sleep. These folks won't suddenly find mounds of gameplay and massive attraction here.

But those who enjoy a visual feast rife with mind-bending puzzles and hours of eye-candy will find their love of *Myst* reborn in *Exile*.

— Michael Wolf

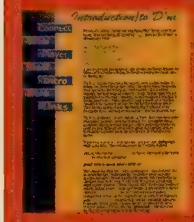


You'll see amazing detail in the features of every object.



Pay close attention to the properties of individual elements; you'll need combinations to solve puzzles.

D'NI MOO



A MOO is a Multi-User Dungeon, Object-Oriented. It's similar to those old text-based games from the days of yore, but played online with lots of other players. Well, if you wish *you* could create whole worlds and populate them with devious puzzles, look no further than *dni.moo.mud.org/MOO/intro.html*. Called *Writers of D'ni*, this MOO lets you engage in text-based interaction and universe creation.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Incredibly beautiful; excellent, challenging puzzles; fantastic acting.

LOWS: Still a puzzle-based slide show; *Exile*'s 3D acceleration support doesn't include Voodoo.

BOTTOM LINE: New life for the *Myst* franchise, but the non-believers won't be convinced.

PC GAMER EXCELLENT 85%

CATEGORY	Action/adventure	REQUIRED	PII 300, 64MB RAM, 400MB HD, 3D card
DEVELOPER	Heavy Iron Studios	WE RECOMMEND	PII 400, 96MB RAM, gamepad
PUBLISHER	THQ	MAXIMUM PLAYERS	1

Evil Dead: Hail to the King

A lame console port: $40. PC needed to run it: $1,500. Bruce Campbell doing Ash voiceovers: Priceless.



The Wolverine Scout Master is a boss character who'll give you a merit badge in pain if you let him.

There's only one reason to play the *Resident Evil* clone *Evil Dead: Hail to the King*, and his name is Bruce Campbell. With the *Evil Dead* movie franchise apparently at a close, *Hail to the King* is the closest to an *Evil Dead IV* that you're likely to see anywhere. And that's a big-Ash'ed shame.

No movie franchise is more ripe for brilliant conversion into a gaming property — you've got laughs, you've got babes, you've got plenty of gore. And of course you have Ash, the laconic, can't-be-ruffled badass who morphed over the course of three movies from a lowly department-store clerk to the universe's most feared demon-slayer.

It's eight years after the end of the last flick, *Army of Darkness*, and Ash is still haunted by the past. To face his fears, he and his new girlfriend, Jenny, go back to the old cabin in the woods that started it all. As you might guess, all hell breaks loose — "the evil" escapes and Jenny goes AWOL.

To return things to normal, you must find the lost pages of the Necronomicon (the Book of the Dead). After you find *them*, you're transported back to medieval times, where you have to find even more pages. (This time, the original notes on which the Necronomicon was based.)

The plot is so thin it could give you a paper cut, and the third-person gameplay isn't any more substantial. Wave after wave of Deadites (ghosts, skeletons, bats, and such) seek to "swallow your soul" as you smite them with your chainsaw, axe, revolver, "boomstick" (shotgun), or rifle. Eventually you realize it's smarter to avoid Deadites than encounter yet another spinning bone-puppet or goo-spewing phantom.

Hail to the King is a console port through and through. Saving your game requires first finding a "blank tape" and then taking it to an "inventory chest." Load times between scenes are distractingly long, and the graphics look like they'd be right at home on the PS one. The game desperately tries to rip off the suspense quotient of *Resident Evil*, but it never musters up the genuine scares that that classic did. It's not creepy, and if it weren't for Bruce Campbell, it wouldn't be all that funny, either.

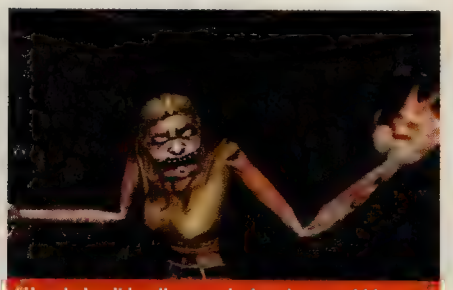
Bruce Campbell *is* Ash, and whereas most big-name movie stars tend to phone in their voice-acting work (*Star Trek: Judgment Rites*, anyone?), Campbell lets fly with both barrels blazing. It's not exactly Shakespeare, but I defy any *Evil Dead* fan to not feel his heart quicken as Ash stares down a thrashing, carnivorous oak and snarls, "Let's go, tree-bitch!"

Hail to the King is about as mediocre as action/adventure games come, but for the opportunity to hear Bruce Campbell back in action as Ash one more time, it just might be worth the dip into console-port hell.

— *Chuck Osborn*



"Hey, [illegible] Daddy! I got a hot chainsaw all ready for you."



"Hey, babe, I'd call you ugly, but that would be an insult to ugly people."

FINAL VERDICT

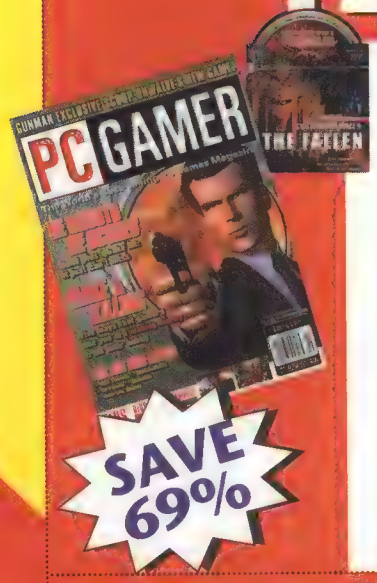
HIGHS: Bruce Campbell's hilariously dry performance; it's the closest you'll get to an *Evil Dead IV*.

LOWS: Sub-par port of a *Resident Evil* rip-off; limited game-saves; monotonous gameplay.

BOTTOM LINE: Only *Evil Dead* diehards need apply. If you're looking for *Res Evil*, buy the original.

PC GAMER 61%
ABOVE AVERAGE

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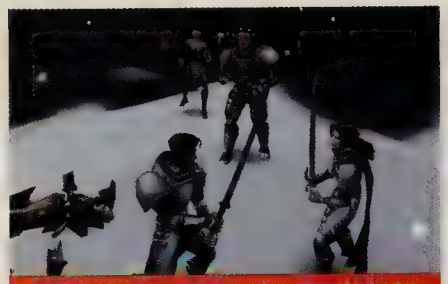
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PC GAMER

CATEGORY Roleplaying	REQUIRED PII 400, 64MB RAM, 800MB HD, 3D card
DEVELOPER Volition	WE RECOMMEND PIII 600, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card
PUBLISHER THQ	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 4

Summoner

Looking for a surprise RPG standout while awaiting the next BioWare release? This one is worth having.



Your four core characters are (counter-clockwise from left) Joseph, Flece, Jekhar, and Rosalind.



Leave town and you'll be treated to many random encounters — in this case, with some angry golems.

My suspicion is that *Summoner* would have been a far more exciting game had Interplay's excellent *Sacrifice* never been made. Conjuring up fanciful 3D creatures to battle for you is cool, no argument. Yet *Sacrifice* serves up such a wealth of creatures, and conjures them with such pomp and style, that *Summoner*'s more modest application of the premise pales in comparison.

What *Summoner* does have going for it is an engaging RPG story, really pretty 3D character models and level designs, and outstanding music and sound effects. Most importantly, it's got a strong sense of adventure, which is sometimes missing from RPGs these days.

Events are sort of dull until you've got your first four-member party assembled, but then the game takes off. The first level is part tutorial, and it's so dependent on genre clichés that you'll start to moan. Hang in there: there's a heckuva game beginning with level two.

The Summoner is Joseph, a 19-year-old straight off the farm in the rural fantasy realm of Meneva. Gifted with the unique ability to use "summoning" rings to call forth magic beasts and golems, Joseph gets a humbling smackdown when a summoning attempt goes wrong and flattens his hometown. Needless to say, Joseph is called upon to shake it off and head into battle against the evil hordes bearing down on the land.

Despite *Summoner* being Joseph's adventure, you can play with other characters leading the party: Flece (a thief), Rosalind (a priest/mage), Jekhar (a warrior), or any of the creatures Joseph summons to his aid. It's definitely Joseph's game, however. If you lose him in battle, his summoned creatures will turn on the rest of the party — always a nasty experience.

You can conjure only one creature at a time, so you'll quickly develop a preference for what beastie you want hanging around. I preferred the Blue Imp. It hangs back with Rosalind, throwing ice attacks and healing party members — both very important when you go up against the four boss demons at the end of the game.

The RPG mechanics are well-thought-out and make the game as simple as can be. Your whole party shares the same pool of equipment, which saves you lots of time in swapping items. AI-controlled party members make good use of the weapons you choose for them, and Rosalind does a fine job of monitoring everyone's health and casting healing spells.

Summoner's camera is its greatest letdown. You're confined to either a High or Low angle; unfortunately, High is useful only for melee battles and is totally useless for ranged attacks — you simply can't see the target. This is a real problem, because in caverns and on stairwells, the High angle is default and unchangeable. D'oh.

Four-player multiplayer mode is really the way to enjoy this game, as each character's various strengths have been pre-configured to form an exciting and effective adventuring party. *Summoner* may not quite be up to the standard of a *Baldur's Gate* session, but it's a cool bit of cooperative gaming. Alone or with friends, it delivers a very appealing RPG.

— George T. Chronis



This bad boy is the first, and toughest, boss demon. Get past him and the rest are no problem.

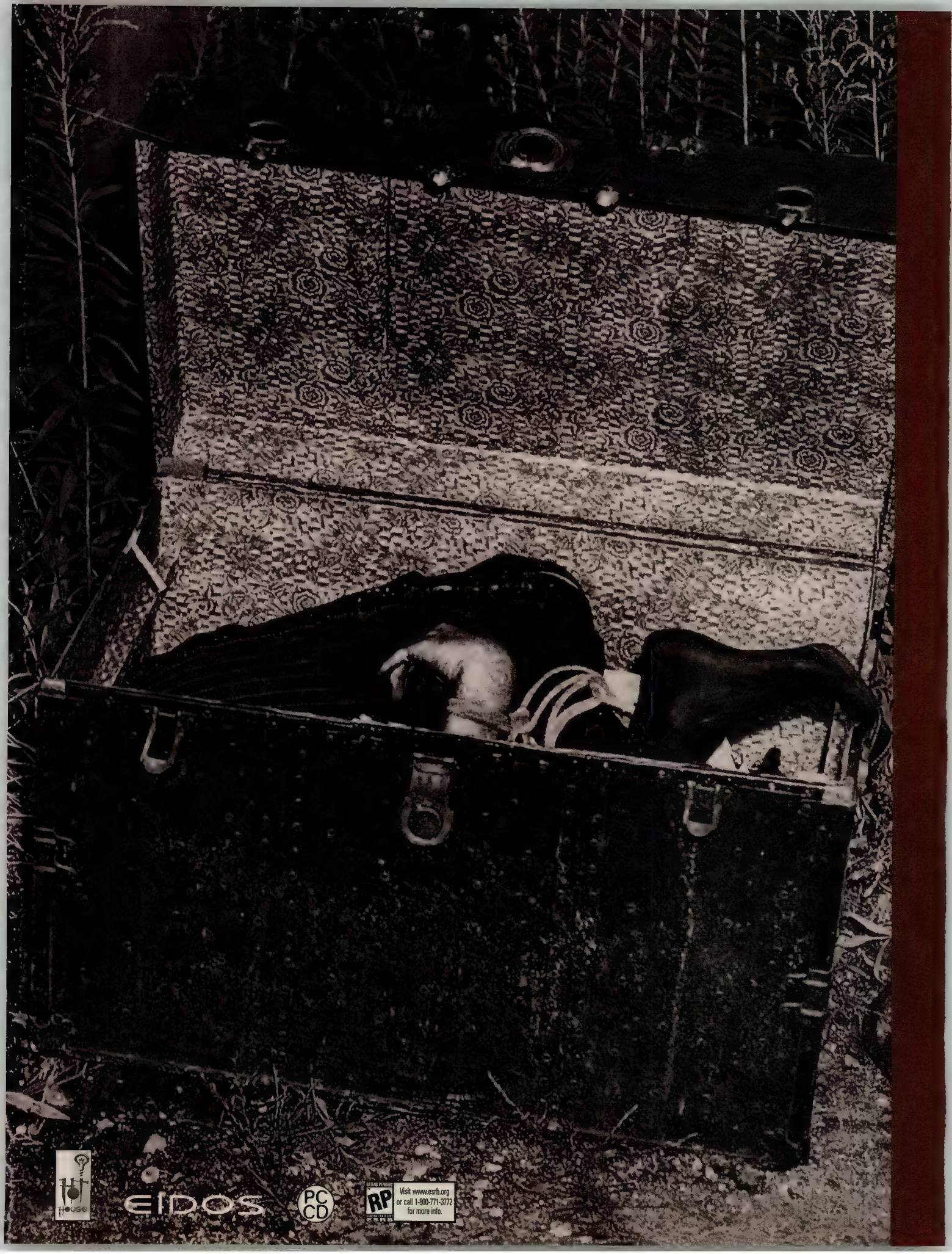
FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great graphics and sound effects; first-rate party AI; engaging story; fun co-op multiplay.

LOWS: Camera angles aren't the most useful; some summoned creatures are worthless in a fight.

BOTTOM LINE: A very competitive RPG, if not quite up to BioWare caliber.

PC GAMER EXCELLENT 81%


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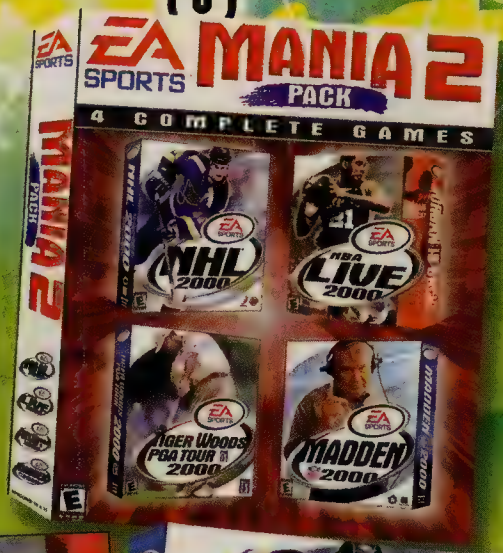
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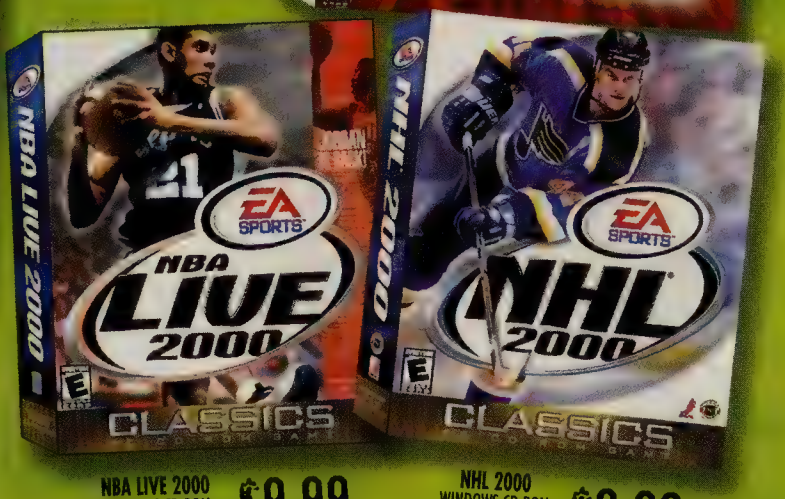
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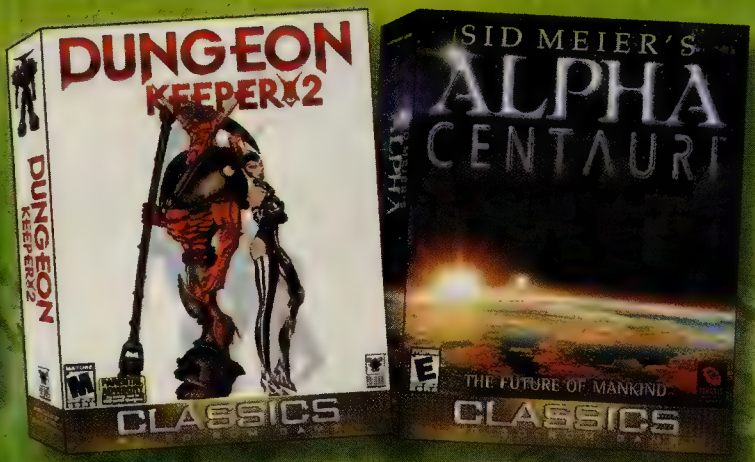


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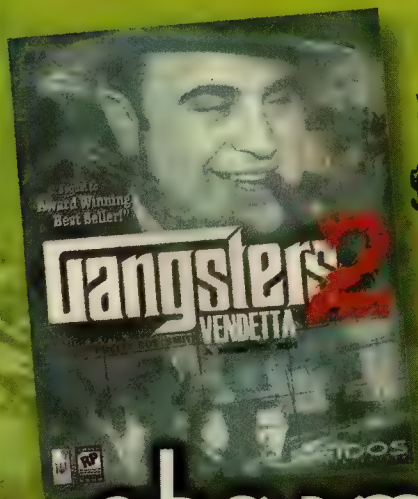
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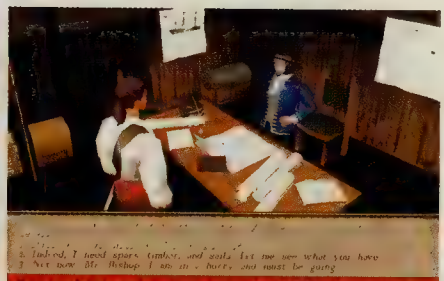
CATEGORY Action RPG	REQUIRED P233, 64MB RAM, 800MB HD, 3D card
DEVELOPER Akella	WE RECOMMEND PIII 600, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
PUBLISHER Bethesda Softworks	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

Sea Dogs

This game is more fun than a barrel of sea monkeys! And you know that has to be a lot of fun. I mean, sea monkeys!



Shiver me doo-dahs and splice the thingamajig – pirates have the best lives.



Deal with locals at ports in the RPG/adventure portion of the game.

Chock full of sea battles, bloody sword fights, and hilarious pirate lingo, Bethesda's *Sea Dogs* is a darn-near perfect pirating adventure. You get hours of challenging gameplay and don't ever have to swab the decks.

This new title from Russian developer Akella (also known for the buggy *Age of Sail II*) offers a unique blend of action and roleplaying set in a fictional Caribbean-style island chain in the 1800s. You're Nick Sharp, the son of a pirate and an escaped prisoner of war. With a small boat and skeleton crew, you can choose to join one of the great naval forces of Spain, France, or England, become a pirate, or just side with whoever seems to be winning at the time. Your relationships with the various navies and the pirates have a huge impact on the course of the game, and will help determine whether you become a rich privateer or shark bait.

Ocean battles make up the brunt of the action, and the isometric real-time combat engine is very smart. Basic strategy involves angling for a side-on-side approach and battering your opponent with cannon fire. After a successful broadsiding, you can board your target and participate in sword battles. Enemy captains have hit points, revving up the RPG thrills of the character-based story.

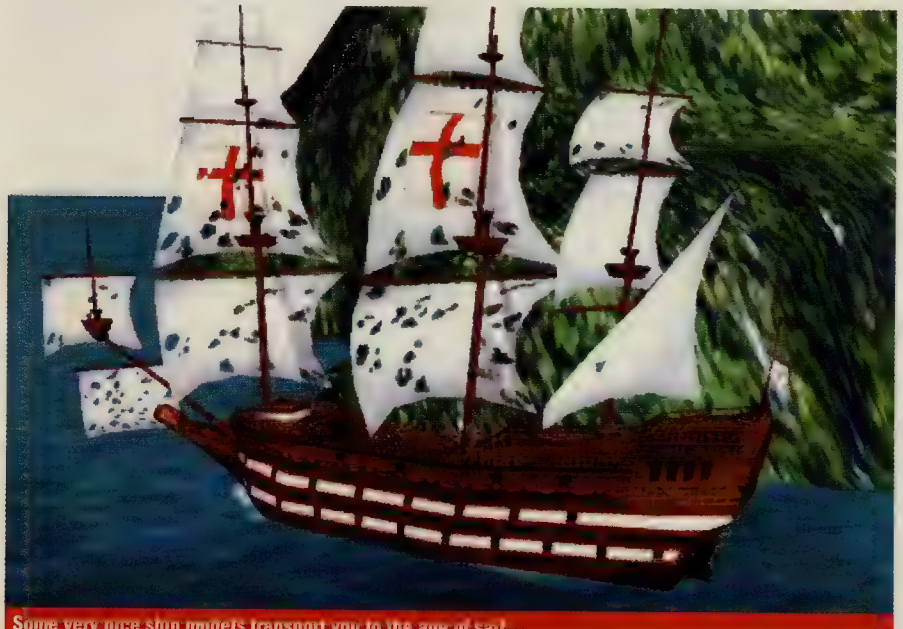
The depth and historical accuracy of this game are surprising. You have many ships to choose from, dozens of different goods to trade, four opposing naval forces, tons of side quests, and lots of dialogue-tree interaction with non-player characters. You decide who you hire as officers and which country you want to support, and you're in full control of the type and size of your cannonballs.

Sea Dogs' graphics and battle sounds are first-rate. All of the ships are beautifully modeled, and every conceivable graphical detail of ship-to-ship combat seems to have been addressed. Sharks swim by during battles, raindrops make little ripples in the water, and sails tear when they're hit. The voices in the game could use some work, but the soundtrack will have you humming sea ditties for weeks. (The RPG dialogue is groaningly bad, but in a totally intentional way.)

The game does have a few definite weak points. For one, you'll need to download lots of patches to smooth over the box release. It takes a while before you can actually earn a boat good enough to win fights, and getting attacked early in the game is infuriating. There are points where you have to spend large amounts of time searching for new quests (mainly trade excursions), reducing you to sailing around and racking up opportunistic missions. And I also feel the game missed a golden opportunity to include pirate monkeys.

Overall, though, *Sea Dogs* is a fun game in a setting that still has plenty to deliver to gamers. Yeah, it's cheesy, but it embraces its limited-budget origins with pluck and charm. And its clever cross-genre combination of sailing, trading, roleplaying, and sea combat is a fresh approach. Don your trusty eye patch and hop aboard.

— Ian Muir



Some very nice ship models transport you to the age of sail.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great graphics; totally non-linear; fun blend of genres; rich, detailed battles.

LOWS: Slow at points; lots of patches to download; voiceovers lack pizazz; no pirate monkeys.

BOTTOM LINE: A surprisingly fun genre-bending pirate game, equal parts RPG and strategy.

PC GAMER EXCELLENT 81%

CATEGORY Roleplaying	REQUIRED PII 266, 64MB RAM, 715MB HD, 8MB 3D card, 28.8K modem
DEVELOPER Origin Systems	WE RECOMMEND PIII 500, 128MB RAM, broadband Internet connection
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts	MAXIMUM PLAYERS Massive!

Ultima Online: Third Dawn

It's the best *Ultima Online* ever — but it's only a small step toward the promise *UWO: Origins* held.



Zooming in is especially handy when you want to count the number of teeth in the nearest beastie.



Third Dawn's forests are lush, wooded, and teeming with wildlife.



You never know what you might stumble upon while wandering about town.

Kudos to *Ultima Online* for setting more standards for online roleplaying gaming than most fans even know about. While it's been around for years now, each expansion update has made only incremental changes. With the latest standalone expansion, *Third Dawn*, Origin introduces a whole new dimension — the third dimension.

Now, before you start to get all excited about the 3D support in *Third Dawn*, you should know that the game still looks *very* similar to the way it did the first day it opened to the general public in 1997. *Third Dawn* is a definite improvement — the landscapes are far more detailed, there's a ton more life wandering around the wilderness (and NPCs in town, for that matter), and the new flora is certainly wondrous to behold. But it's still just "sprites into polygons" — the overall look remarkably similar to the 2D version.

UO is still played in the isometric top-down perspective, but now characters are polygonal, and when you open up your "paper doll" (to outfit your character and track stats), the character representation can be spun about and viewed at all angles. A huge number of social gestures are now available, and Origin has used motion-capture techniques to create some truly marvelous animations.

The roleplaying aspects have been improved as well. The years of experience have certainly paid off for *Ultima Online*. You start off with a blank slate: a character to form and mold into whatever image you choose. You can assume any role, from a devious wizard to a strong warrior or even a humble tailor.

After starting the game, you have 40 hours of play time available before you lose your newbie status. During this "young" period, your fledgling avatar won't be attacked by vicious creatures in the wilderness, and you'll be free from player-killing bandits who have a tendency to prey on the defenseless. These improvements certainly make the game less frustrating to play — especially for those new to the world of online RPGs.

Third Dawn also introduces a new land, Ilshenar. You can get there only by traveling through Moon Gates (magical portals), and while it contains a plethora of new fauna to kill and items to find, it doesn't support any player-built houses. The wilderness will, in fact, remain a wilderness — good news to those who are tired of stumbling across a city of players' houses in the midst of a beautiful forest.

Those who have been sucked into the world of *Ultima Online* will certainly find a lot to like here. However, it's still just an expansion (even if its standalone setup means you don't need any familiarity with *UO* going in). Those looking for something more amazing than 3D-supported special effects for some spells will be disappointed.

It seems obvious that this release was intended as a pacifying offering for *UO* players until the true sequel, *Ultima Worlds Online: Origin*, hit the market. Sadly, that will never happen now that Origin has cancelled the project, and we'll have to make do with possible future expansions coming from the remnants of Origin's once-glorious past.

— Michael Wolf

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Sweet animations and polygonal characters; new land to explore; interface improvements.

LOWS: Engine is still a bit stuttery; overall, more of the same, just in a prettier wrapper.

BOTTOM LINE: There's a lot to like in this expansion — but it's no replacement for *UO2*.

PC GAMER GOOD 78%

CATEGORY	Action	REQUIRED	PII 266, 32MB RAM, 100MB HD
DEVELOPER	Gabriel Interactive	WE RECOMMEND	PIII 450, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
PUBLISHER	WizardWorks	MAXIMUM PLAYERS	2

Robot Arena

If you're expecting a groovy new *Quake III* expansion pack, you've entered the wrong *Arena*.



My 'bot name may not be that original, but then again, neither is the game.



This guy's snazzy paintjob is no match for dual buzzsaws. Vreeeeeee!

It's all starting to come together: budget software company (A) churns out a PC version of a trendy "extreme" sport (B) to sell half-assed, bug-ridden product (C). For you mathematical types, A + B = C. And let's be frank — we all know what the letter "C" stands for.

Robot Arena is the most recent in a long line of budget titles that fit perfectly into this proven and pathetic equation. It's patterned after TV shows like *BattleBots* and *Junkyard Wars*. For those unfamiliar with this burgeoning cable-TV spectacle, envision cockfighting with homemade, radio-controlled robococks. The battles usually end with one vicious robot pummeling the weaker competitor into a useless pile of scrap metal.

The game itself consists of two stages: lab and arena. In the lab, you create your robot from scratch using parts that fit together like Tinker Toys. There are different styles and variations of each accessory, but far too few; weapon options are also sparse, limited to saw blades, air rams, hammers, and axes.

Once you're throwing down in the arena, the graphics are actually pretty good, and the damage effects are downright impressive. Saw blades spark, leaving charred gashes in opponent armor, and hammers make hefty dents wherever they strike true.

And while the music is the repetitive rock/pop loops we've come to expect with budget titles, the sound effects are right on. The explosions and twisting metal sound like they're coming from these tiny, mechanized gladiators and not exploding Boeing 747s.

Arena combat, however, is so simple that it should be marketed to kids as *Tonka Robot Arena*. If you adhere to the main strategy of trapping your opponent into a corner for every single match, you should have no problem beating all competitors on the first try. The enemy AI is so lame that I would often position myself behind hazards like spikes and flamethrowers only to find the 'bot proudly strutting toward me in a straight line — *over the trap*, blowing itself to smithereens.

There's also no in-game commentary or post-game stat sheet. These additions should have been no-brainers for a game that bases itself on TV-style competition.

Even multiplayer *Robot Arena*, which you'd think would be fun for a few sessions, is desperately in need of a good patching. When you play via TCP/IP or LAN, 'bots freeze or warp back and forth around the arena. On the rare occasion that I got a game up and running, all it took was one lucky cornering to hack away and smash an opponent's robot into toaster parts.

Though they may be one intellectual step up from *Celebrity Deathmatch*, I enjoy occasionally catching the robot bouts on TV — which is why I was sorely disappointed with *Robot Arena*. None of the mechanical mayhem or pseudo-strategy from the TV shows survived the adaptation to the PC. You'll most likely play the game for 45 minutes (exactly how long it takes to finish the single-player game) and then toss it aside to collect dust for eternity next to the other budget software you thought was "a heck of a good deal."

— Scott Humphries



You can win any match simply by cornering your opponent and pounding on him mercilessly.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Nice damage modeling and sound effects; decent weapon special effects.

LOWS: Way too easy; boring combat; terrible enemy AI; buggy multiplayer mode.

BOTTOM LINE: If you can read this review, you're too old to play *Robot Arena*.

PC GAMER DON'T BOTHER **32%**

CATEGORY Action	REQUIRED PII 266, 32MB RAM, 500MB HD, 3D card
DEVELOPER MicroProse	WE RECOMMEND PIII 600, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
PUBLISHER Infogrames	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 16

X-COM Enforcer

This sure ain't *X-COM*. But it's a decent, if mindless, shoot-'em-up backed by the *Unreal Tournament* engine.



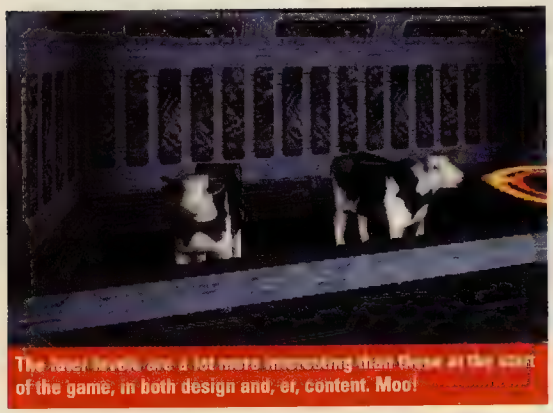
A veritable smorgasbord of aliens is available for your shooting pleasure.

Any ties that *Enforcer* claims to the legendary original *X-COM* series are cosmetic at best. Whereas the *X-COM* strategy games served up a nail-biting, turn-based combat model with equally compelling base-building and research modes, *Enforcer* is a run-and-gun arcade action game with about as much brainpower as an *Alien Autopsy* producer.

So, what exactly is an Enforcer? It's an alien-killing machine, pure and simple. You take on the role of this xenophobic contraption, and with the help of your creator — a geeky scientist with a lisp, named Professor Standard — you set out to rid the Earth of otherworldly menace. Off you rush, guns blazing, into a third-person chase-cam shooter.

The game's 40 missions break down into a few different categories: finding and destroying all the transporters (alien spawning machines), rescuing and defending humans, and occasionally facing a boss creature. Though it may sound like an interesting mix, the missions all play pretty much the same: keep your finger on the trigger and just keep moving and blasting.

Some of your objectives have time limits, which does present a semi-interesting twist. But if you fail any mission, you'll have to start again from the beginning, as there are no in-level saves. Forty missions + no saves = tedium.



The later levels are a lot more interesting than those at the start of the game, in both design and, er, content. Woo!

Another annoyance is that you can carry only one weapon at a time. Bizarrely, random weapons appear constantly, and running over one causes it to become your current weapon. And when you're busy trying to kill 30 or more swarming aliens, it's irritating to lose your trusty flamethrower and find yourself saddled with the less effective freeze gun.

With every kill, aliens leave behind "data points." By collecting these points, you unlock new weapons and powers and improve your existing abilities. Each level also contains power-ups (speed burst, health restoration, and such) and five letters that spell the word "BONUS." Collect all five and you'll go to — you guessed it — a bonus round where you collect even more data points. Some of the bonus rounds are inspired by classic arcade games like *Pac-Man* and *Frogger*.

Enforcer uses the *Unreal Tournament* engine and is a decent-looking game overall, but many of the early levels are boring indoor locales, with more exotic alien locations improving the look in the latter stages. The aliens, in all their varied forms, are well-rendered, and the weapon effects are a particular highpoint. But it's going to take a top-of-the-line machine to run the game at the higher resolutions, especially when there are dozens of enemies onscreen at once (a very common occurrence).

Online play, supported by GameSpy, includes both deathmatch and cooperative play, and finding or starting a game is a simple procedure that's built right into the interface. Internet gameplay ain't *UT*, so let's just leave it at that.

This certainly isn't a game that will have you glued to your computer for hours on end, but booting it up every once in a while to plow through a level or two can actually be rather cathartic. Just don't try to compare it to the classic franchise or you'll wind up sorely disappointed.

— Rob Smolka

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Cool weapon effects; lots of levels; decent graphics; bonus levels are fun.

LOWS: Gameplay turns monotonous; no in-level saving; annoying weapon-switching.

BOTTOM LINE: If you can turn off your brain, *Enforcer* can be fun for 20-minute sessions.

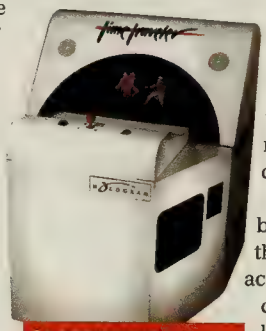
PC GAMER 57%
MERELY OKAY

CATEGORY	Dreadful	REQUIRED	Pentium, 6x CD-ROM drive
DEVELOPER	Rick Dyer	WE RECOMMEND	Smashing the CD into tiny pieces
PUBLISHER	Digital Leisure	MAXIMUM PLAYERS	1

Hologram Time Traveler

Pop quiz. Buying *Hologram Time Traveler* will leave you: (a) $39.95 lighter, (b) With a pounding headache, (c) Potentially blind, (d) Without a shred of hope for the future of humanity, or (e) All of the above. If you answered (e), then you're a sharp, savvy reader who: (a) Knows bad games when you see them, or (b) Always answers "All of the above" to quiz questions.

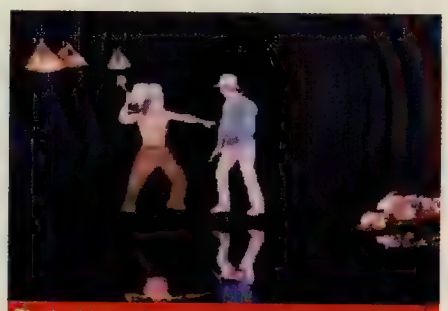
Regardless, the PC release of *Hologram Time Traveler* is an exercise in pure greed. There's nothing wrong with nostalgia, but Digital Leisure has so blatantly man-handled this port of a mid-'80s arcade footnote — remember the bubble-topped, stubby white console and holographic characters? — that any fond memories you may have of playing it will be erased forever.



An arcade novelty becomes a PC travesty. For shame!

In case you forgot, you play as cowpoke Marshal Gram. The allegedly beautiful (it's hard to tell) Kyi-La, Princess of the Galactic Federation, has been kidnapped by the evil Vulcor, and it's your job to travel through time to rescue her. "Rescuing" means facing a series of low-budget live-action vignettes in which you must make *Dragon's Lair*–style choices to survive.

Without the specialized bubble display found in the arcade, the "hologram" gimmick is accomplished by packing in a cheap pair of red-and-blue-lensed paper glasses and making the game's background "3D." (You can also play it in 2D, thankfully, without the glasses.) So awful is the effect that not one *PC Gamer* editor could stand to watch the sad, sorry display for longer than 10 seconds without ripping the glasses from his face.



That's either an Indian or *The Golden Girls'* Betty White. We're not sure.

Topping it off, the game opens in a window the size of a postage stamp; enlarging it to full-screen reveals a low-res pixelated mess. For a suggested price of $39.95, we expect more. A *lot* more.

P.T. Barnum said there's a sucker born every minute. Unfortunately, Digital Leisure is counting on it.

— Chuck Osborn

FINAL VERDICT
PC GAMER 7%
DON'T BOTHER

CATEGORY	Turn-based strategy	REQUIRED	P120, 32MB RAM, 200MB HD
DEVELOPER	John Tiller	WE RECOMMEND	P200, 64MB RAM
PUBLISHER	HPS Simulations	MAXIMUM PLAYERS	2

The War of 1812

Most Americans — even most wargamers — know only a couple of things about the War of 1812: (1) We're pretty sure it took place in 1812, and (2) We were fighting some country other than America.

The war was mostly about an American attempt to invade and annex Canada, and most of the land battles raged along that northern frontier. (Though its most famous battle took place in New Orleans, and produced our national anthem.) When the conflict ended, remarkably little ground had changed hands, despite some serious blood-letting.



The Battle of New Orleans as seen by God, or by a passing seagull.

While the legendary naval battles of this war have been simulated before, John Tiller's new survey game of the land battles marks the first time the land campaigns have been wargamed in PC format, and that fact alone makes *The War of 1812* very appealing.

It's based, logically enough, on the *Campaign 1776* engine, but Tiller has refined and improved most aspects considerably. The map scale is now tighter (one hex = 42 yards) and a new auto-defensive fire option enables PBEM opponents to enjoy a more streamlined and dramatic experience. Joe Amoral's graphics are excellent as always.

Other features include solid scenario- and campaign-editing utilities, and a full array of hypothetical, might-have-been engagements. As was true with *1776*, the campaigns sometimes end rather abruptly: If I want to play out the *whole* war, I should be able to do that, but every time I started down that path, the "whole war" campaign short-changed me by petering out after a few high points. Of course, you can get almost the same experience by playing the individual scenarios in their proper chronological order; I just didn't feel like doing so.

That quibble aside, however, I recommend this new John Tiller opus as warmly as I have his previous HPS games. Where this fascinating but little-known war is concerned, it's literally the only game in town.

— William R. Trotter



New Orleans: "Sir Nick ry said we could take 'em by surprise if we didn't fire our muskets 'til we looked 'em in the eyes!"

FINAL VERDICT
PC GAMER 83%
EXCELLENT



Picnic anyone?

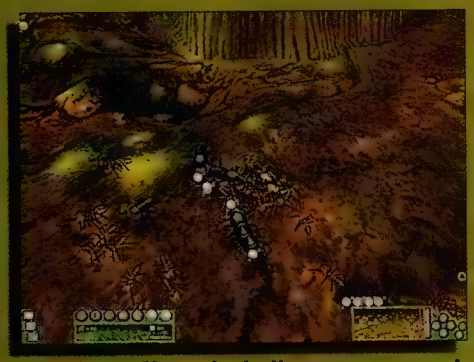
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EMPIRE OF THE ANTS

Based on the book by Bernard WERBER

Distributed Exclusively by

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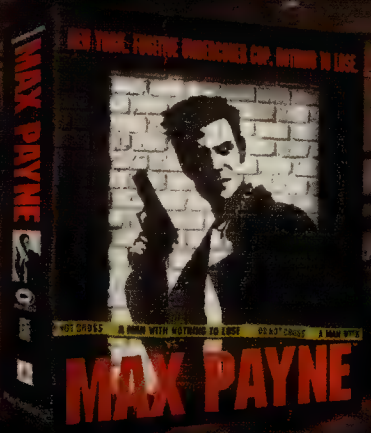
INFOGRAMES

MICROIDS

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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— PC GAMER

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DEVELOPED BY REMEDY

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PC CD ROM

PlayStation 2

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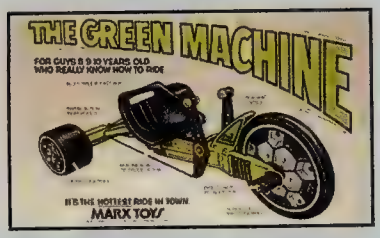
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The Green Machine

Last month I whined and moaned about never owning the mighty Tetsujin 28 toy robot. This month, I'm having fond memories of a toy I *did* own: The Green Machine. Talk about a kickass ride! Back in the late 1970s I was the top man in my local "plastic tricycle" gang.

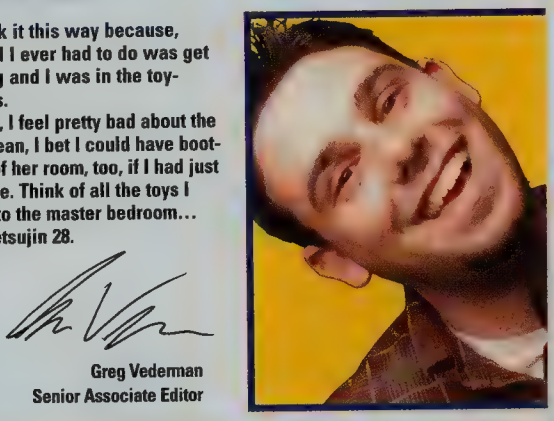


While all the other "wheelers" tooled around on Big Wheels, the big dog — TheVede — pedaled around in high style on the green, three-wheeled love machine.

Suffice it to say, I was the envy of every child in my townhouse complex — though it might not have been the green machine specifically that the kids loved me for; I also had two bedrooms of my very own — both filled to capacity with toys. That's right: I was a spoiled child.

At the time, I lived in a three-bedroom house in Santa Cruz, California, and although my mom had the master bedroom, I had full control over the other two. One of them was a bedroom filled with toys, and the other was a toy room filled with toys. I was able to work it this way because, with my mom, all I ever had to do was get the tears flowing and I was in the toy-owning business.

In retrospect, I feel pretty bad about the whole thing. I mean, I bet I could have booted my mom out of her room, too, if I had just cried a little more. Think of all the toys I could have fit into the master bedroom... Maybe even a Tetsujin 28.



Greg Vederman
Senior Associate Editor

HSTRINITY

WELCOME TO A BRAVE NEW WORLD

So you want to build a new PC, huh? As you may know, it can be a tricky affair. Luckily, Hard Stuff editor Greg Vederman is here to help you select the best parts for the job. The prices listed below (obtained almost entirely from *www.pricewatch.com*) reflect the lowest prices we could find as we went to press.

ENTRY-LEVEL SYSTEM
PRICE: ROUGHLY $999

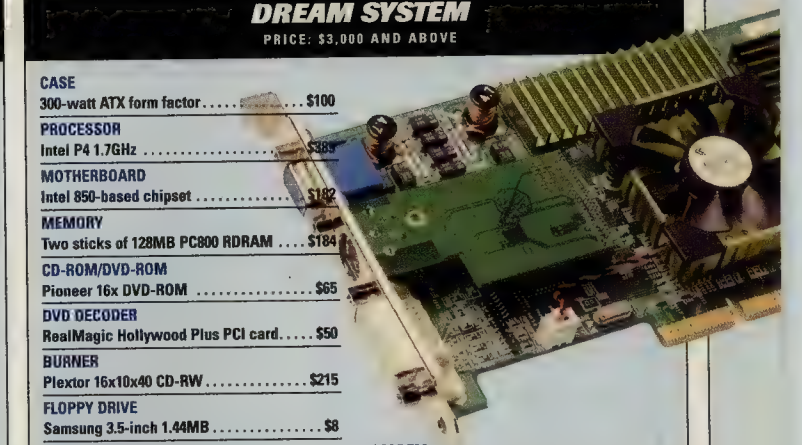
CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	$100
PROCESSOR	
Intel Celeron 800MHz FCGA	$87
MOTHERBOARD	
Gigabyte GA-6VX7-4X	$84
MEMORY	
256MB PC-133 SDRAM	$39
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM	
Creative Labs PC-DVD Ovation 12x with software DVD decoding	$99
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE	
IBM Deskstar	$97
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! Value	$36
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 hardware modem	$60
MONITOR	
17-inch Optiquest Q71	$170
VIDEO CARD	
GeForce2 MX	$53
JOYSTICK	
Logitech WingMan Digital	$17
GAMEPAD	
Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad	$23
SPEAKERS	
Labtech Pulse-424 — 2.1	$39
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics	$15
USB MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft	$39
TOTAL	$966

MID-RANGE SYSTEM
PRICE: ROUGHLY $1,800

CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	$100
PROCESSOR	
AMD Thunderbird 1.333GHz	$176
MOTHERBOARD	
Asus A7V	$118
MEMORY	
256MB PC-133 SDRAM	$39
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM	
PC-DVD Encore 12x with Dxr3 technology	$123
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE	
IBM Deskstar 75GXP 307060	$197
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! MP3+ 5.1	$77
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 hardware modem	$60
MONITOR	
19-inch NEC FE950	$399
VIDEO CARD	
NVIDIA GeForce2 Ultra	$299
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Precision Pro	$53
GAMEPAD	
Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad	$23
SPEAKERS	
Logitech SoundMan Xtrusio DSR-100 — 4.1	$132
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics	$15
USB MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft	$39
TOTAL	$1,858

DREAM SYSTEM
PRICE: $3,000 AND ABOVE

CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	$100
PROCESSOR	
Intel P4 1.7GHz	$3[illegible]
MOTHERBOARD	
Intel 850-based chipset	$182
MEMORY	
Two sticks of 128MB PC800 RDRAM	$184
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	$65
DVD DECODER	
RealMagic Hollywood Plus PCI card	$50
BURNER	
Plextor 16x10x40 CD-RW	$215
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE(S)	
Two 81.9GB ATA-100 Maxtor DiamondMax Proxima	$480
IDE RAID Controller	
Promise FastTrak100 (ATA-100)	$75
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! Platinum 5.1	$149
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 hardware modem	$60
MONITOR	
21-inch Optiquest Q110	$541
VIDEO CARD	
NVIDIA GeForce3	$399
JOYSTICK	
Saitek X36 Flight Control System (USB)	$96
GAMEPAD	
Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad	$23
SPEAKERS	
Klipsch ProMedia v.2-400	$299
KEYBOARD	
Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$40
USB MOUSE	
Original IntelliMouse with IntelliEye technology	$55
TOTAL	$3,410





PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

ALIENWARE

Area-51

1.7GHz CPU?...Wham! GeForce3?...Bam! DV capabilities?...Thank you, Ma'am!

COMPANY
Alienware
www.alienware.com
877-484-5536

PRICE
$5,898 (as configured)

SYSTEM SPECS

SYSTEM
Processor: 1.7GHz Intel Pentium 4
Motherboard: Intel D8G850
Memory: 256MB PC800

STORAGE
Primary Hard Drive: IBM Deskstar 30.7GB
DV Hard Drive: IBM Deskstar 61.4GB
DVD-ROM: Pioneer 16x DVD Player
CD-RW: Plextor Plexwriter 16x/10x/40x

EXPANSION
5.25-inch bays: 4 (2 used)
3.5-inch bays: 6 (3 used)
Bus Slots: 1 AGP (used), 5 PCI (3 used)
RAM Slots: 4 (2 used)

VIDEO
Primary Display Adapter: 64MB GeForce3
Monitor: 19" NEC FE950B

AUDIO
Sound Card: Sound Blaster Live! Platinum 5.1
Speakers: Klipsch ProMedia 4.1

OTHER
Mouse: Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer
Mousepad: sUrface 1030
Controller: Saitek X35-X36F
Network card: Intel Pro/100 S
Capture Card: Pinnacle DV500 Plus
Camcorder: Canon Optura Pi



You know it. We know it. With the notable exceptions of GeForce3 and Pentium 4, huge technological leaps have been all but absent from PC land for some time. (And the latter's status as a "leap" is up for debate in certain circles.) There's nothing wrong with this phenomenon — in fact, it's probably a good thing. It gives gamers with older components a little more time to smell the roses before being forced to contemplate a serious upgrade. Still, it's made testing new computers a little less exciting than it has been in the past.

In May 2001, Falcon Northwest successfully kicked things up a notch (BAM!) by including an amazing $6,500 Sony digital projector with its newest Mach V. Sure, we can't afford something like that ourselves, but darn it all to heck and back, it sure was great to test it out and be able to tell you guys about it — on the off chance that *you* could afford one. Along similar lines, the Area-51 we were sent is much more than a regular-ol' gaming rig.

Though gaming systems are still its core business, Alienware sells more than that these days. It's recently added a new line of computers called "DV: Non-Linear Editing Solutions." These powerful DV (Digital Video) systems are designed to be entry- to videographer-level home-editing stations (depending on configured hardware and software options) — replete with digital-capture cards, DV camcorders, dual processors, RAID arrays (IDE or SCSI), and Windows 2000.

The system we were sent for review is a hybrid. It runs on Win ME, and is primarily a gaming system, with some trey-cool DV editing hardware and software thrown in for good measure. With a system like this, several editors around the office *[read: Vederman — Ed.]* have made mention of possible side careers as producers of high-quality "home videos." As unimaginably horrible as that sounds, this Area-51 is more than up to the task.

The DV portion of this system is multi-faceted and includes a Canon Optura Pi digital video camcorder, a Pinnacle Systems DV500 Plus video-capture system, and a 60GB hard drive on which to do your editing, along with the 30GB drive for everything else.

The Canon DV camcorder is a fine thing. It's not top-of-the-line, but it's plenty good for the price. It comes with a genuine 12x zoom lens and can digitally zoom all the way up to 48x. Be advised: things get rather grainy the further you dip into digital-zoom territory. The unit records to either 60- or 80-minute Mini DV cassettes (in LP mode, you can stretch recording time to two full hours with the 80-minute tape) at a maximum resolution of 720x480 (360,000 pixels).



This is a simulated image, but Vede really does look like this.

BENCHMARKS

QUAKE III
(All tests run in 32-bit color with effects set to max)
640x480: 175.1 fps
800x600: 170.5 fps
1024x768: 146.7 fps
1280x1024: 98.3 fps
1600x1200: 69.7 fps

3DMARK 2000
(All tests run at 1024x768 in 32-bit color with effects set to max)
3DMarks: 9,107
Game 1 Helicopter
Low Detail: 180.3 fps
Med Detail: 136.5 fps
High Detail: 83.4 fps
Game 2 Adventure
Low Detail: 195.9 fps
Med Detail: 102.2 fps
High Detail: 60.7fps
Fill Rate with multi-texturing: 1,299.6 MegaTexels per second

3DMARK 2001
(All tests run at 1024x768 in 32-bit color with triple frame buffer and compressed textures)
3DMarks: 5,981
Game 1 Car Chase
High: 34.3 fps
Game 2 Dragothic
High: 44.9 fps
Game 3 Lobby
High: 51.4 fps
Game 4 Nature: 23.0
Fill Rate: 1,376.9 MegaTexels per second
Vertex Shader: 40.2 fps
Pixel Shader: 84.2 fps

MDK 2
800x600: 177.5 fps
1024x768: 174.0 fps
1280x1024: 124.6 fps
1600x1200: 86.9 fps



In terms that make sense to the average Joe, image quality is improved over that of a standard analog camcorder and recordings are infinitely easier to edit since everything is done digitally, either on the camera itself (it offers a few of its own effects and editing tools) or on your PC — after being transferred to your desktop via FireWire (IEEE 1394).

You can take snapshot images at 720x480 as well, and in Progressive Scan Mode, the Optura can even record 30 individual full-frame images per second for those times when you want to catch fast-moving objects in motion — e.g., a golf swing or the *PC Gamer* team after being told that free doughnuts await them in the break room. Better still, several hundred shots can be recorded on a single Mini DV tape. While 720x480 is nothing compared to the maximum resolution of many digital cameras, it isn't half bad considering that the Optura is a camcorder. And with its beautiful 3.5-inch color LCD viewfinder, previewing your shots (and movies) in real time is a breeze.

None of the Optura's features would amount to much if you couldn't bring the digital movies and pictures you've taken over into your PC. Here's where Pinnacle's DV500 Plus comes in to play. This package includes a DV capture card that has two IEEE 1394 inputs and a port for connecting the included A/V breakout box. That box has one composite video in and out, one S-Video in and out, and one set of left and right audio ins and outs (RCA) for when you want to output or input signal to or from an analog device like a VCR. We ended up using the box to input video from another PC so that we could capture in-game movies, and the results were excellent.

The software that drives the DV500 board and allows you to edit your pictures, video, and sound is a combination of several different editing tools all brought together in Adobe Premiere 6.0. None of them are terribly difficult to use, but it's no walk in the park. It took two reasonably intelligent, tech-savvy individuals a day and a half to figure out the most important features, and even then there were oodles of features left untapped. If we had bothered to read any of the included, well-written manuals ahead of time, our lives would have been made considerably easier.

The extra 60GB hard drive is best used only for editing work, since the raw AVI files (AVI's the file format used to save uncompressed digital footage onto your PC) are *huge*. One minute's worth of video with audio takes up 217MB of hard-drive space. At that rate, it takes only about 17 minutes of raw footage to reach Win ME's file-size limit of 4GB. Big problem? Not really. There are very few times when you're going to need to import 17-plus minutes of raw, uncut footage. Most of the time, you're going to be cutting and pasting much smaller bits of video together to make a cohesive whole. With the 60GB, you've got all the room necessary to work with these massive files.

When exporting to MPEG, WMV, or QuickTime, the fact that they're all compressing video in various degrees means that you'll have an extremely hard time creating a final video for the Web or for a CD that's going to get anywhere near the 4GB ceiling. If video editing is your primary concern, however, give some serious thought to going with Windows 2000 instead of Win ME. Its max file size is somewhere in the multi-terabyte range, thus alleviating the bottleneck altogether.

Don't forget, this Area-51 is a gaming system, too — the fastest one we've ever tested. At 1.7GHz, the P4 chip in this machine is as new and as powerful as they come. The relatively small jump from the 1.5GHz we reviewed a two months ago has still pushed the P4 to where it now bests the fastest AMD system on the block (the mighty 1.333GHz Thunderbird with DDR system memory) in every game-related test we could come up with. Interestingly enough, the Thunderbird still pulls ahead slightly in productivity-software applications, but we're not losing much sleep over it.



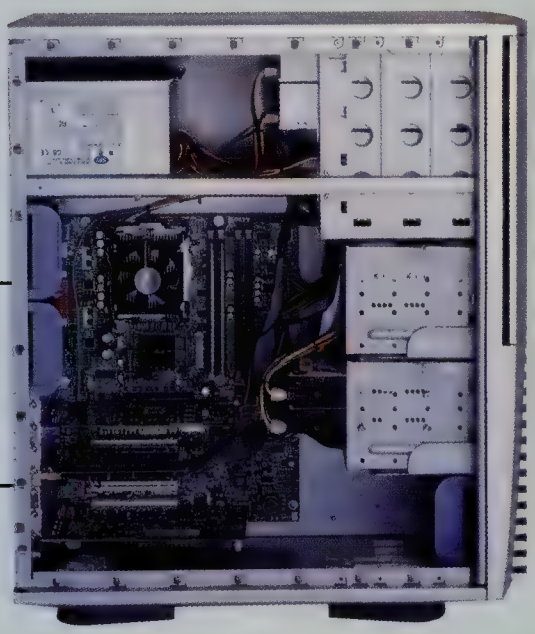
The KoolMaxx fan blows cool outside air over your AGP and PCI cards.

For design, the new Alienware "Dragon" case is very eye-catching. Unlike the case before it, where the plate covering your drive bays slid down, this new one opens to the left — a slight pain in the butt from an aesthetic standpoint if you're planning on making good use of the included Creative Labs Live! Drive IR. But the overwhelming functionality of the case precludes us from getting too hot under the collar about it.

As always, the inside of the system is immaculate, and thanks to the design of the Dragon case, each of the 5.25-inch devices in the system can be conveniently removed from the outside via rail clips once you've disconnected any internal connections.

Alienware has been painting its cases for a while now. What's new and noteworthy is that in addition to the case, your Klipsch speakers, and even your monitor, can now be painted in one of eight different colors, too. We're talking high-quality work here. The system we were sent was painted silver, and each of the components looked as if the manufacturer had made them that way from the start.

The ubiquitous "black book" has of course been included in the package as well. In it, you'll find all sorts of detailed information about your system, along with system-setup, system-recovery CD, troubleshooting, and warranty info. Your complimentary fUnc sUrface 1030 — the best mousepad around — is also awaiting you here.



Fans aplenty call this case their home. Not only does Alienware keep the inside neat and clean, but they also knows how to keep your system running its coolest.

Alienware's technical support has been improved recently, and your included one-year 24/7 onsite warranty should be more effective than ever. We tried calling the toll-free tech-support line several times over the span of a couple days (and nights), and never had to wait more than a few seconds to reach a real person with real tech knowledge.

With all this information firmly in hand, please excuse us while we return to our hectic "home video" production schedule. Lights, camera, "action"!

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Blisteringly fast P4; GeForce3; fancy paint job; powerful DV creation and editing tools.

LOWS P4 1.7GHz CPU is fast — and much less expensive than anticipated — but it still costs a couple hundred more than AMD's fastest offerings.

BOTTOM LINE Alienware builds some of the best systems money can buy. If you're in the market for a new computer of any sort, for just about any purpose, you'd be nuts to pass them by.

"The Area 51 runs crop circles around the competition!"

-PC Gamer 2001

PC GAMER EDITORS CHOICE

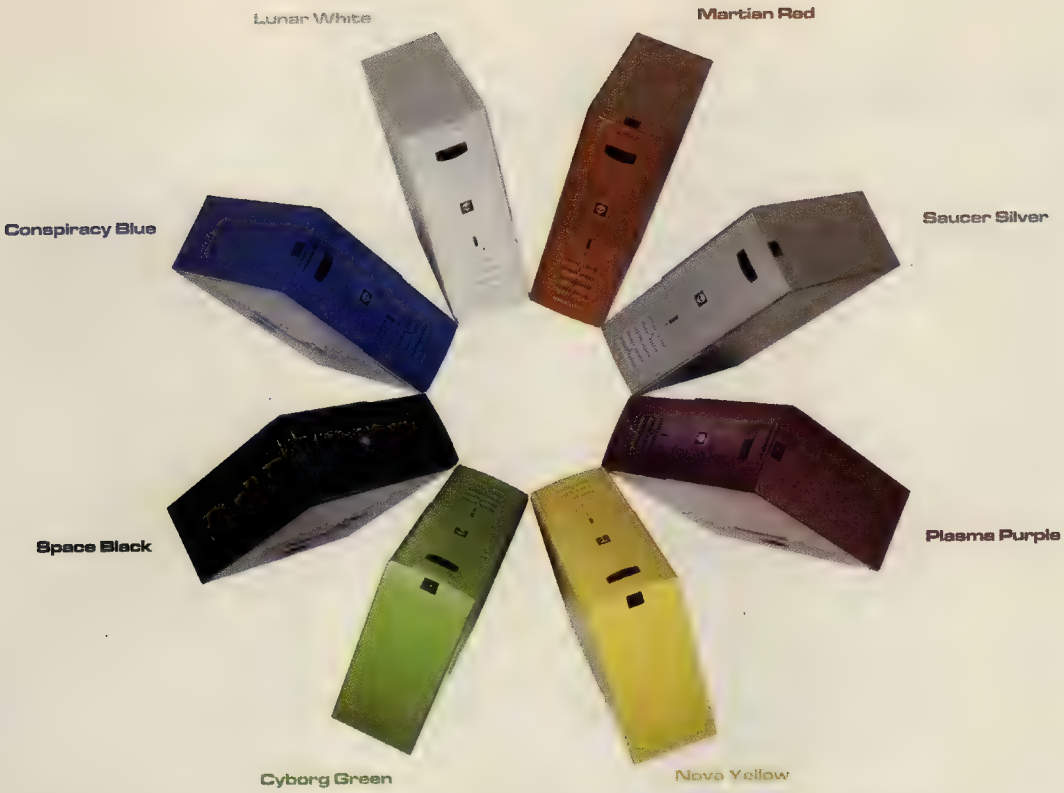


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AREA 51™

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Intel® 850 Chipset Motherboard
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NVIDIA GeForce3 nFinite-FX™ GPU 64MB DDR
Koolmaxx™ Video Cooling System
SoundBlaster LIVE! 3D Sound Card
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Speaker & Subwoofer System
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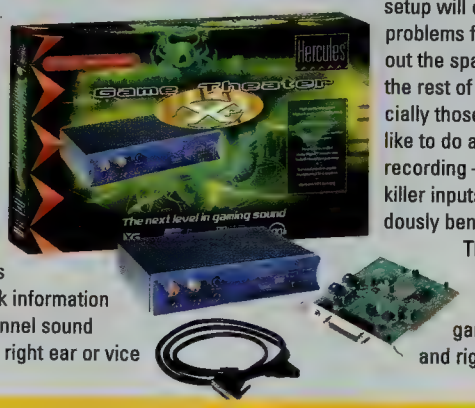
SOFTWARE BUNDLE

What is the fantastic software bundle, you ask? It is:

- ACID XPress
- Siren Jukebox XPress
- Kool Karaoke Lite
- MAGIX playR
- Music Match Jukebox
- PowerDVD

Creative Labs has held control of the sound-card market for so long now that true challengers are few and far between. Hercules is one such challenger, and it has brought some serious power to the table with its Crystal CS4630–powered Game Theater XP.

Like any legitimate contender, the Game Theater supports every well-known standard, including DirectSound 3D, EAX 2.0, A3D 1.0 (2.0 is lacking, but then again, so is Aureal), I3DL2, and more. When it comes to playing games with this card, expect "2D" sound quality and "3D" surround-sound effects that are every bit as good as what you'll hear with a Sound Blaster Live! — sometimes even better, thanks to the way the XP does away with cross-talk information (e.g., bits of left-channel sound being heard by your right ear or vice versa) that can often muddle the quality of four-channel audio.



Instead of placing inputs on the hard-to-reach rear of the sound card, as is the norm, Hercules has placed all standard inputs and more on its external breakout box — connected to the sound card via a very heavy, shielded cable. Unlike the Live! Drive that Creative Labs ships with its Platinum cards, this external device cannot be placed in an open 5.25-inch bay. Instead, it's designed to be placed on top of, or around, your computer case. This setup will create a few problems for those without the space, but for the rest of us — especially those of us who like to do a bit of home recording — all these killer inputs are tremendously beneficial.

The front of the unit has two USB ports, a gameport, left and right line inputs, and a headphone jack. The rear contains your standard main and surround mini input jacks, six RCA inputs for plugging in true 5.1 Dolby Digital speakers (sound output via PowerDVD's certified Dolby Digital decoder), two more USB ports (one will be used by the USB connector cable that attaches to a USB port on your computer), a digital coaxial input and output, an optical input and output, and a MIDI in and out.

The fact that the rack can't be mounted in some way is a bit of a downer, but overall, the unit is amazingly versatile and the sound card itself is terrific. Add in the fantastic software bundle, and you've got the best high-end sound-card package around.

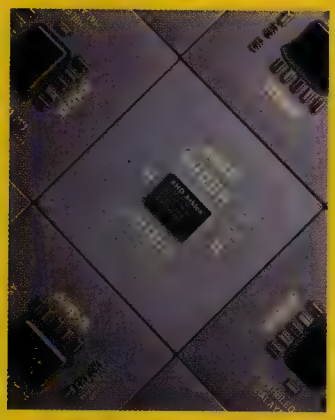
FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Supports all the major sound standards; amazing rack unit; great sound; includes top-notch software.

LOWS Rack unit can't be mounted; older versions of the card ship without the newest drivers (update to version 2.0 ASAP).

BOTTOM LINE Move over, Sound Blaster Live! Platinum 5.1: the Game Theater XP is here to stay.

HSTECHQ&A



Q **I'm building a new system and am quite interested in an AMD Thunderbird. I've heard about strange overheating issues. I've also heard that AMD makes better processors for gaming. What's the deal?**

— B.C., via email

A Nah, overheating isn't a problem. If you get a decent CPU fan and have good airflow in your case, you'll be fine as long as you aren't overclocking. As for the Thunderbird being a better CPU for gaming, that's largely true. The new 1.7GHz P4s are plenty fast in many games, but they're more expensive. As such, the Thunderbird should still be considered the top choice for most PC gamers.

Q **I bought an HP Pavilion 6735 in September 2000. It came with a Celeron 633MHz and 64MB of RAM. I've since added goodies like a 32MB TNT2 and another 64MB of RAM. When I purchased the computer, the sales guy also mumbled something about being able to overclock my Celeron, but I was too busy staring at a Sony VAIO nearby to hear what he said. I plan to add another 128MB of RAM to my system this fall to get it ready for *Red Faction* et al. Is it possible to overclock my Celeron? How many more MHz can I expect? Is it safe?**

— Siddharth Ghosh, via email

A While you probably can overclock your Celeron 633MHz, you'll almost certainly need a new motherboard in order to do so. Why? Because overclocking your chip requires a board with adjustable front-side bus settings — an uncommon feature in retail systems. By the time you've bought the new motherboard, along with a new computer tower (your HP likely won't take a standard motherboard), you could have just bought yourself a new CPU and put it in the existing system for less money.



Q **I'm building a new computer and my price range falls about $500 beyond your Trinity's mid-range system. If you were me, where would you put the extra $500?**

— Rick Luebbers, via email

A Take the mid-range system and add a GeForce3 and a 1.33GHz Thunderbird. Beyond that, consider moving from a system that uses SDR system memory to one that uses DDR. These are great performance-enhancing changes that should get you into the price range you're looking at.

SAITEK

P8000 Command Pad

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Saitek has a long history of making some very unique gaming peripherals. Many of them are brilliant. A few of them aren't. The P8000 Command Pad falls on the wrong side of this critical divide.



Designed to be a simplified keyboard, the P8000 functions adequately, but the question we kept asking ourselves was, "Why?" With its eight-way hat switch and fire button, it also functions as an extremely basic gamepad of sorts, but clearly that's not its strongest feature, either.

The P8000 has 35 programmable buttons (along with a shift button that doubles the number of assignable commands to 70) that can be assigned to single keyboard keystrokes or full-on massive macros. And still, we're asking, "Why?"

The unit itself is rather large for what it is — roughly the size of a standard keyboard. While the buttons are big and easy to see (much like a telephone designed for the elderly), they feel nothing like standard gamepad buttons or keyboard keys. As a result, we were sometimes left wondering if we had actually hit a button or not.

To get the most out of the P8000, you're going to need to print up templates that can be locked into the face of the unit for easy navigation of the commands you've created for a given game. This requires you to use either your existing full version of PaintShop, or the included evaluation version (6.0), which provided a fair share of difficulties. Now, it's not quite as scary as it all sounds since Saitek also includes a JPEG template for you to use when creating your own inlay cards, but jeepers, what a pain in the butt. And without the custom inlays, of course, any benefits gained by the simplified layout of the device are lost.

Hardcore sim fans may find a use for the P8000, but the rest of us will survive just fine without it.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Looks very much like a Saitek product (a good thing); powerful programming software.

LOWS These days, we're not sure that grognards would appreciate (or need) a product like this.

BOTTOM LINE While it does work as advertised, the P8000 is difficult to recommend for most purposes.

Q **I just recently upgraded my existing PC with 128MB of SDRAM, an AMD Duron 800MHz, a 10GB HD, a SOYO motherboard, Diamond Viper2 Graphics, and more. As soon as I assembled everything, I began testing all of the games I already had installed on my old hard drive. They seemed to work fine until I started playing *X-Wing Alliance*. At that point I noticed that my joystick port wasn't working. I couldn't fix the problem myself, so I called my uncle (a computer programmer) for help. He got the joystick working, but afterward I couldn't play the other games that I had installed on my system: the computer started loading them and would then just drop me back to my desktop.**

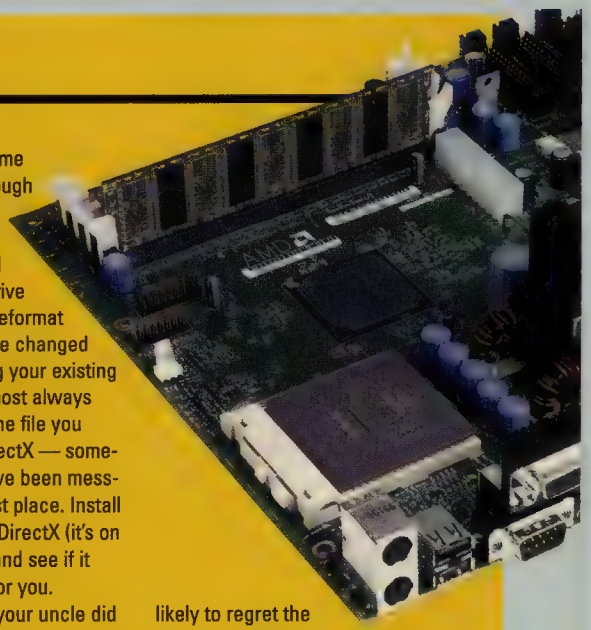
After thinking about my problem, I deleted my dsound.dll file, and found that new games I installed on the system worked fine. I got really excited, and tried to go back and play my older games once again, but they still didn't work. This time, a window popped up and said: "Couldn't find file DSOUND.DLL." What do you think is going on with my machine? Did I do something I wasn't supposed to do?

— Chris Pounder, via email

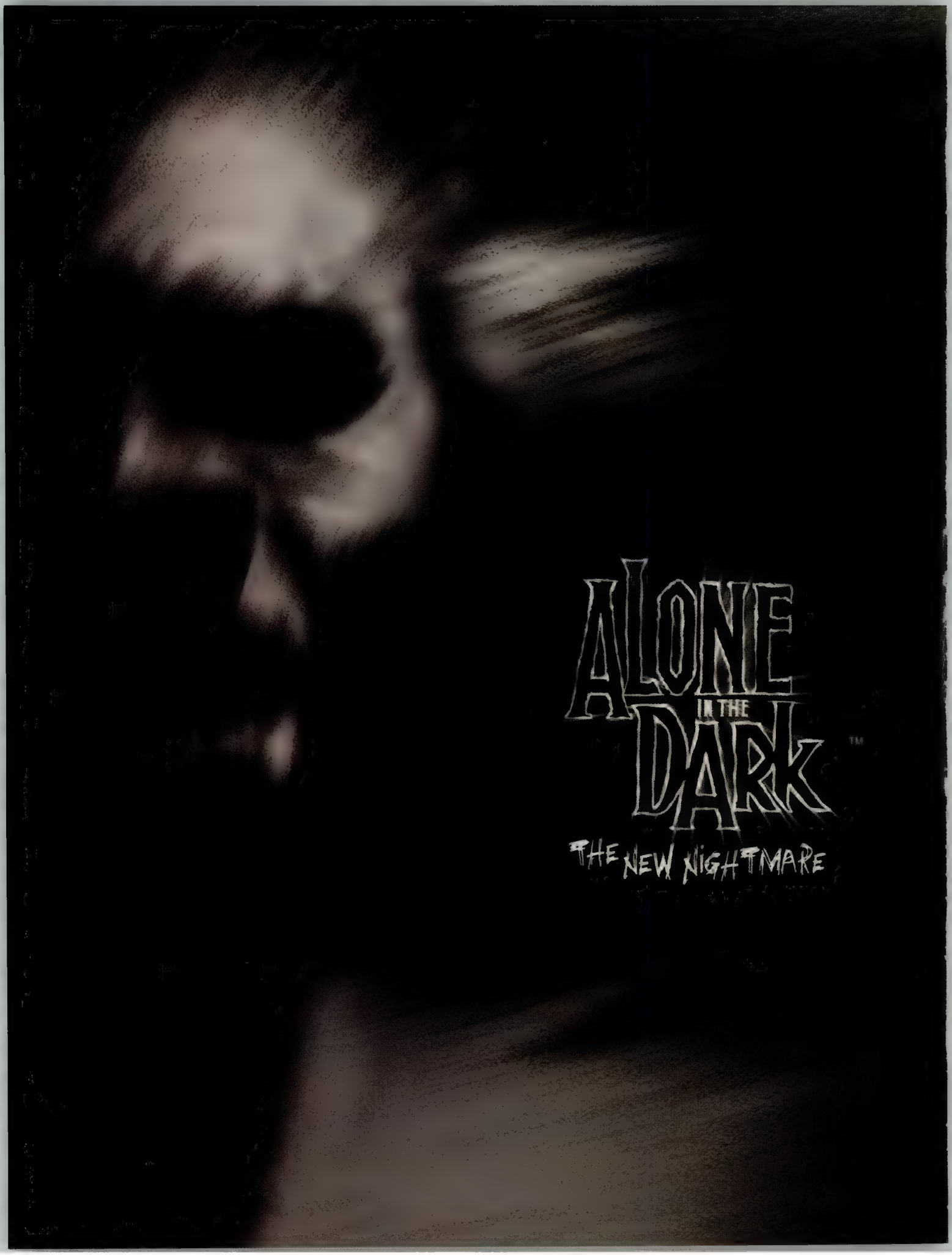
NEED HELP?

If you have a hardware question or comment, or a personal problem, write to:
Greg Vederman
Hard Stuff, PC Gamer
150 North Hill Dr.
Brisbane, CA 94005
or email:
gvederman@pcgamer.com

A It sounds to me like even though you got a new hard drive, you ended up using the old one as your primary drive without performing a reformat first. Sadly, once you've changed motherboards, keeping your existing install of Windows almost always spells trouble. As for the file you deleted, it's part of DirectX — something you shouldn't have been messing with a lot in the first place. Install the newest version of DirectX (it's on this month's *PCG* CD) and see if it helps improve things for you.



I'm not sure what your uncle did to get your joystick port working, but it sounds like he may have ended up causing some system conflicts in the process. To be honest, by the time you're done putting out all of the "fires" on your system, you're likely to regret the time you wasted. I suggest that you get your uncle back over and have him help you back up your important files prior to wiping your drive and starting over with a fresh install of Windows 98 SE.


ALONE
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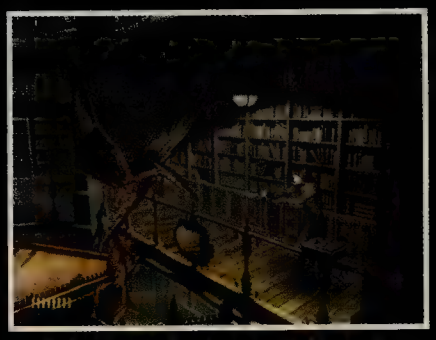
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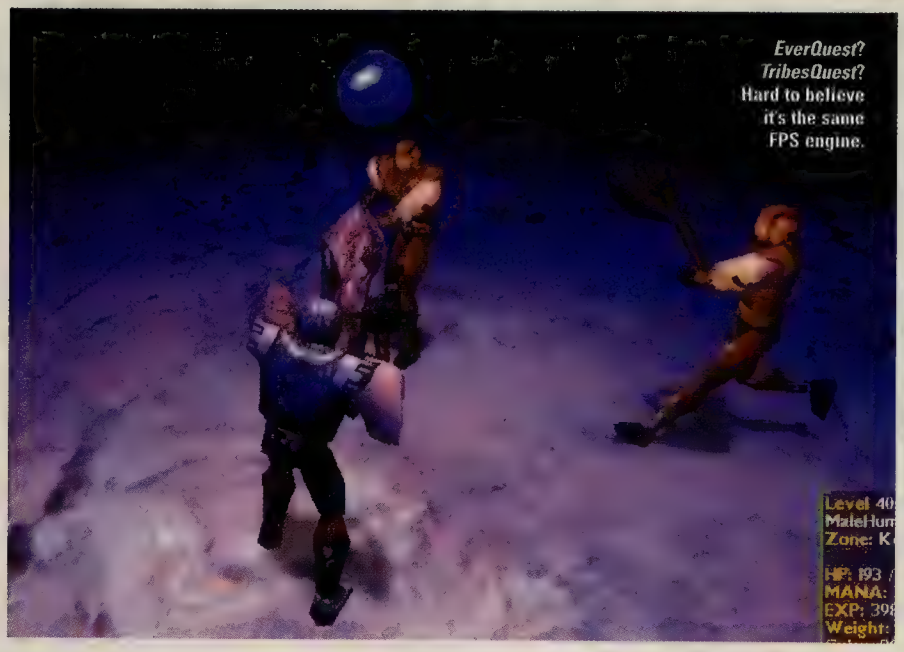


EXTENDED PLAY

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All Hail the *Tribes RPG*

It began as a first-person shooter, but some enterprising modders have turned *Tribes* into a first-rate RPG.



When you hear the word *Tribes*, you think of a multiplayer first-person shooter played in a wide-open environment. What you *don't* think of is an RPG dungeon crawl.

And yet, a sophisticated and increasingly popular 3D roleplaying game has evolved from the *Tribes* mod community, and has now reached a level of accomplishment that places it squarely alongside some of the competitive professional RPGs of the moment. How did it happen? Mathieu Bouchard and his team of modders, that's how.

As coder for the *Tribes RPG* (*TRPG*), Bouchard set out to create a roleplaying game in the mold of *EverQuest* or *Asheron's Call*, using the *Tribes* code as the skeleton. His fanciful concept has grown, over the course of what Bouchard describes as "basically two years of open beta," into a surprisingly deep and enjoyable RPG.

So now it can safely be said that FPS engines don't necessarily have to handcuff modders to the genre of the games that came out of the box!

To say the original *Tribes* code has been heavily modified would be an understatement. It's virtually unrecognizable. *TRPG* has a medieval look, and moving through its towns, castles, and dungeons, you seem to be galaxies removed from the sci-fi battlegrounds of *Tribes*.

"It easily compares to store-shelf games in many aspects," believes Bouchard. "It could pass as a full-fledged game."

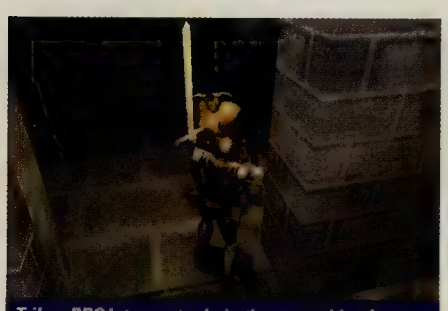
He ain't kiddin', either. *TRPG* began as a game modeled closely after the AD&D rules, but has since evolved into one featuring a detailed set of character classes built on a skills-based rules system that allows for deep customization of your character. From the four classes (fighter, wizard, rogue, and priest — further broken down into sub-classes like paladin, ranger, and bard), you can tailor a uniquely skilled character by training in the specialties of other classes.

"Essentially, the skill system enables a class such as a fighter to cast spells," says Bouchard. "But it would take a very long time, through training and skill-point allocation, to [make such characters] capable of casting even the weakest ones."

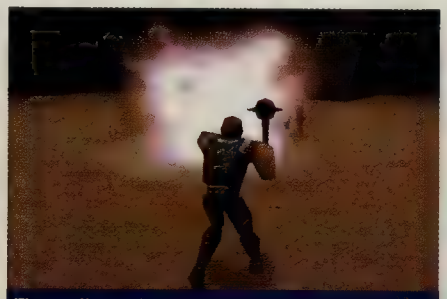
Similarly, nothing prevents a wizard from taking up weapons and learning the skills to use them in combat, though he'd obviously face a significantly tougher learning curve than a fighter would.

The skills system is complex enough that it's replaced the usual statistics system completely. There are 20 skills, ranging from Dodging, Stealing, and Hiding to Speech, Sense Heading, and Haggling.

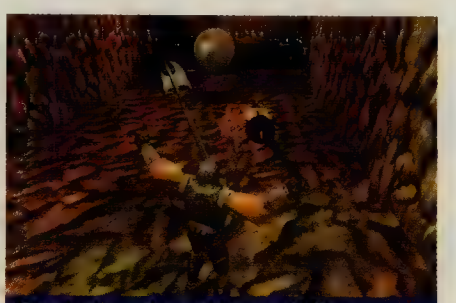
Graphically, the designers have demonstrated a significant talent for environment design. Much of the game is a crawl through the standard diabolical dungeons, but the structures in the main town are very impressive, and supported by changes to an already robust graphics engine.



Tribes RPG lets you trade in the open skies for a surprisingly detailed dungeon crawl.



The mod's spells and spell effects add to the overall RPG ambience.



"Moo-ha-ha — the world is *mine*!" New animations and player models are abundant.



It's not all dungeons. The main town includes lots of shops, guilds, and player-killers.



"We represent...the skeleton guild...the skeleton guild...the skeleton guild."



Impressive architecture abounds. Duck into church for a soulful John Woo moment.

TRPG boasts a responsiveness to user input that puts commercial enterprises to shame. Updated constantly, the new builds incorporate the plethora of suggestions that players leave at the *TRPG* forum (*www.planettribes.com/rpg*). Bouchard has been updating three to four times a week, regularly adding sought-after new features. "User feedback has been the most useful tool in creating this game," he says.

One thing's for sure: *TRPG* has all the frills you'd demand in a commercial product. You begin the game in Keldrin Town, which features merchants, banks, armorers, and an arena in which you can safely practice and improve your fighting skills. When you reach a certain experience level, you become eligible to join guilds and Houses; membership in a House allows you to PK and get PK'ed by members of other Houses. Think of it as mob membership — opportunities for great riches abound, but at the risk of death at the hands of a rival player. It's an ingenious compromise to the eternal PK debate.

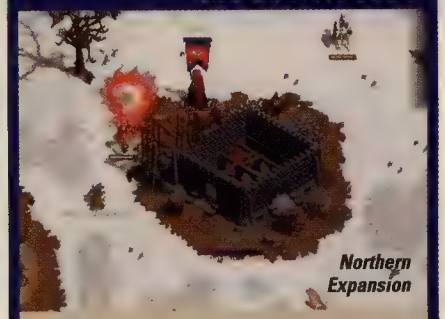
The other innovation of *TRPG*, made possible by its very smallness, is the fact that individual Gamemasters are in charge of the individual servers. As with *EverQuest*, you can have one character on each server, but unlike *EverQuest*, each server is an individual human GM's unique domain and he can modify it any way he wants. This results in a variety of highly tweaked "worlds" in which to get lost, server by server.

"Server owners can manipulate and script the world as they please," explains Bouchard. "I've coded more than 160 administrator commands (similar to IRC commands), and an event-driven quest scripting language."

With the help of two 3D modelers, a skin designer, and a webmaster, Bouchard has assembled a vibrant multiplayer RPG from the skeleton of *Tribes*. It's amazing to think that a game out of the box can be so *completely* re-imagined, to say nothing of the fact that *TRPG* can hold its own compared to almost any 3D RPG of this kind. Kudos to the dev team — and yes, they *are* working on a *Tribes 2 RPG*.

Check it out at *www.planettribes.com/rpg/downloads*. PCG

ADD-ONS AND ENDS



Northern Expansion

MORE *MAJESTY*

When *Majesty* appeared a year ago, it was hailed as a delightful hybrid of the RTS, RPG, and sim genres. You built structures (especially hero guilds) in your kingdom, using tax money and purchases by your populace. Heroes couldn't be directed; they had to be coaxed into exploring the terrain and destroying enemies by placing bounties. With the new *Majesty: Northern Expansion*, developer Cyberlore has delivered an impressive add-on pack that goes considerably beyond the standard "dribble 'em a few scenarios and units."



MNE adds 12 new scenarios to the 20 in *Majesty*. Many offer interesting variants on the simpler, more direct scenarios in the original. For instance, in one case you're surrounded by pestiferous Elven casinos (surely you know about those Elves...) and enemy-run Rogue settlements, which are leeching away your own wealth and must be eliminated carefully only after you've built up your own forces.

You also get six new buildings, such as the Sorcerers Abode, which lets you cast six new powerful player spells, and the Embassy, which recruits veteran heroes at random intervals from distant lands whenever your local hero guilds have openings. (The new spells include Change of Heart, a hex that makes a frightened hero turn again and fight, or causes a battling hero to run away — perfect for those times when some brave idiot is ready to die instead of retreat and heal.) Many hero classes have been tweaked as well — and that's only fair, since a host of new enemies have been added. Expect to run up against powerful Rat Shamans, Ratapults, Greater Gorgons, Yeti, and even Ice Dragons. And, of course, *Majesty* still has its delightfully quirky humor and great AI...What, haven't you expanded the *Majesty* of your kingdom yet?



— Barry Brenesal

ROB SMOLKA
pointafter@pcgamer.com



THE POINT AFTER

BASEBALL · BASKETBALL · FOOTBALL · HOCKEY · GOLF · SOCCER · ETC.

Ever-Ball? Never Say Never

The current craze of massively multiplayer games got Smoke thinking about how sports could hop on the bandwagon.

With games like *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online* raking in roughly $3 million a month thanks to their hefty subscriber bases, it's no surprise that everyone and their pet ferret is keen to join in on the festivities.

In the December 2000 issue, we did a roundup of all the massively multiplayer games in development. What struck me most was not just the number of games in the pipeline, but how little difference there was between them. Sure, most had a twist of sorts, but few sounded truly compelling enough to make the current audience want to start anew. I think that in order for another massively multiplayer online game to succeed, it needs a totally new fan base — namely, sports fans.

The question, though, is how to make a persistent sporting world that works. While I don't have the whole thing figured out, I do have a few seeds of thought to plant for any developer that would like to cultivate the idea further. All of these ideas can apply to any sport.

Every online game consists of a few different user types. There's your casual player that might log on once or twice a week. There's also the player that may log on every day, but only has an hour or so to devote to each session. Then, of course, we have the devoted gamers that log on just about every day and stick around for four or more hours. For any game of this type to work, it must offer each group a good reason to keep coming back, or at least have a decent ratio of converting casual players into devoted players.

> There'd be a very simple "pick-up game" element for casual gamers, scaled all the way up to sim-style career modes for the hardcore.

So there'd be a very simple "pick-up game" element for the most casual gamers, scaled all the way up to intensive, sim-style career modes for the hardest of the hardcore.

Within each server, there would be a complete system of "schoolyard" pick-up games, as well as minor and pro leagues. The goal of the pick-up games would be to prove your abilities at a certain position and advance (with your newly won experience level) to the attention of a minor-league tryout. At first, moderators would be needed to act as commissioners, owners, and managers, but as the game matures, subscribers could aspire to these positions as well.

This is how you could reward the players who devote the most time to the game. Prizes or trophies could be awarded to the winning teams, and there could even be cross-server competitions so that those acting as commissioners could feel a sense of pride in their server. High-ranking players could be invited every month or so into invitational tournaments for the benefit of the league scouts.

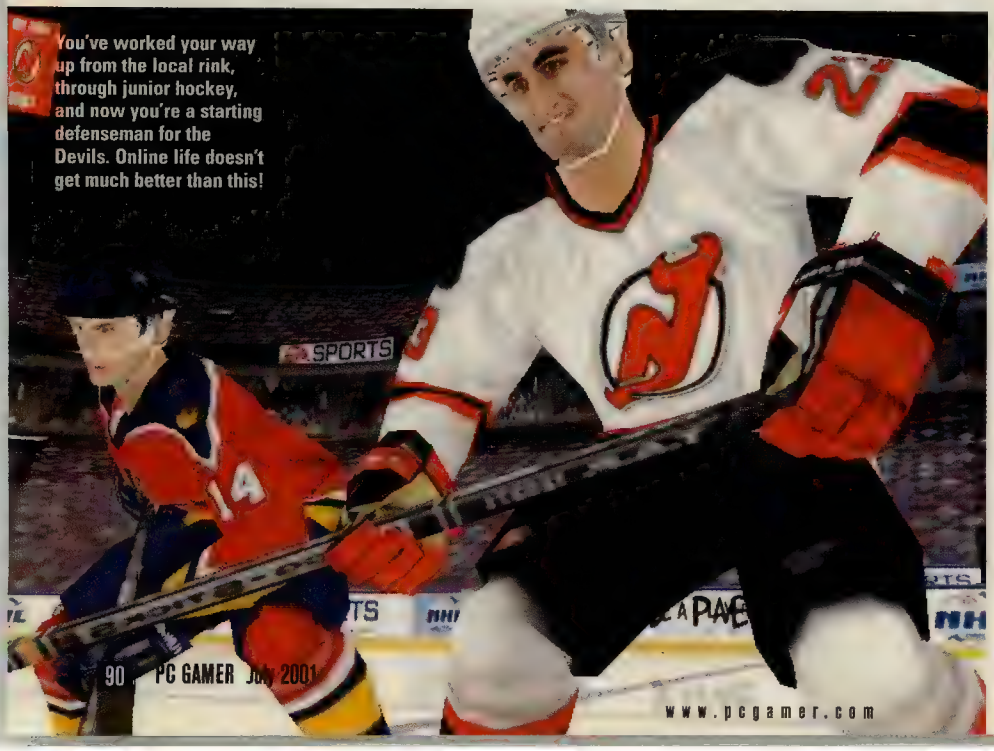
Certain positions — namely pitcher and quarterback — would, of course, be the most sought-after. As such, there'd have to be a method for allowing each subscriber to have a chance to "try out" at these highly coveted spots. Maybe a rule that allows you to sign up for certain spots only once each hour of online time would work. I'm sure a few rounds of beta-testing would uncover a good balance and give an equal opportunity to all.

There could also be a financial system in place that pays the better players a certain number of "points" (which could be used to get free games, a free month of service, etc.). Owners would have to scout the server for talent and make contract offers, and also work with their managers to decide who to sign and who to let go.

Drafted players would, of course, have to make some kind of commitment to the team, and show up for scheduled games. If a player felt he couldn't devote the time necessary to be on an organized team, he'd be free to continue playing pick-up games (perhaps becoming the "schoolyard legend" that everyone always says could have been a real star if he had played in the big show).

The persistent world would thus provide entertainment for players of all skill levels *and* devotion levels. Heck, you could even provide a spectator mode to get pick-up warriors logging on just to watch their favorite pro teams' scheduled games. How cool would that be?

Obviously, the design document for such a game would easily fill this magazine. For it to work, broadband will be necessary, as well as a more mature brand of online gamer. Just think, though, how much fun it would be to live a persistent online life as a pro athlete. Let me know what you think by writing to *pointafter@pcgamer.com*. PCG



You've worked your way up from the local rink, through junior hockey, and now you're a starting defenseman for the Devils. Online life doesn't get much better than this!



COLIN WILLIAMSON
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Doom /// Meets Flower Power

Colin hears the pitiful pleas of Mac FPS players — and decides their cause may not be so pointless after all.

Being a low-life games weasel living in Tokyo, I caught word that the latest Macworld expo would be taking place in Chiba, a pleasant little burg a half-hour from my apartment. I thought about going, then kicked myself for allowing such a stupid thought to pop into my head. After all, I go ballistic every time I hear Steve Jobs call new colored cases "revolutionary," and my car would probably get keyed if anyone saw my "MACS ARE GOOD FOR KICKING" bumper sticker.

So I kicked back with a Kirin Lager and played a few hours' worth of *TFC* on my favorite Korean server instead. This went exceptionally well until the apartment manager spilled oolong tea into the router downstairs for the third time this week, putting me out of commission. I'm sure you know where this is leading: I received a call later that day from a fellow journalist who was panting over how he had been the first kid on the block to see *Doom III*. Demoed by John Carmack. At *Macworld*.

Arrrgh!

Naturally, id opted not to release any official *Doom III* screenshots, so late stragglers like myself were forced to squint at low-quality streaming webcasts, and marvel over virtually incomprehensible screens of volumetrically lit blobby things. All that we could really tell was that the game would be dark, the environments huge, and there were, like, demons and stuff.

Worst of all, id said the game would hit the Mac first. Actually, that's a total lie — the GeForce3 will be available on the Mac before the PC, an act that will assuredly give hardcore Apple fans bragging rights *for the rest of eternity*. According to Internet message boards (being the infallible news sources that they are), the GeForce3's weeklong Mac exclusivity establishes the G4 as the true gamer's machine, sounds the death knell for consoles and Wintel boxes alike, and may be a harbinger of The Second Coming.

At this point, I could only begin to sympathize with our slightly misguided friends, whose computing lives are dictated by whatever amalgamation of gaily colored plastic and circuits comes out of Cupertino.



(Oh, and for the record, I *do* own a Mac — I pulled a fully loaded Power Mac out of a local university dumpster. It now ferments beneath an accumulation of laundry in the corner of my apartment.) I checked my backlog of reader emails and discovered that I'd been getting a disturbing number of Mac-related letters, many of which were mourning the cancellation of Mac *Half-Life*. Some were requesting that I cover more Apple-related games. Wow. They're really out there.

And now I *feel* for these people. They're *proud* of their "supercomputers" that "outperform" Pentiums in various "tasks," and yet they can't get online to play *Counter-Strike* or *Team Fortress Classic*. They sit in the classroom with their heads on their desks, while we frolic outside on the playground.

But I'd argue that we *need* Mac gamers joining in our online games — if for no other reason than that they'd be great frag fodder.

Here's a little anecdote. Back when I was interning at a games company, our network admin was a hot-shit *Quake* player. Macworld was coming to town, so he took the day off and entered the Mac Gaming Tournament, where FPS-savvy Mac-heads were set to compete in a smattering of FPS titles.

"Maybe I'll win something," he said. He came back with a brand-new G3, along with all of the *other* first-place prizes. Our boy had easily laid the smack down in *Quake*, *Unreal*, and *Klingon Honor Guard* — a game that he'd never even played before. I asked him how the "best of the best" Mac players stacked up against everyone else. He threw back his head and laughed maniacally.

Yes, Mac gamers are to online FPSs as TIE Fighters are to *Star Wars*, jobbers are to professional wrestling, and giant rubbery monsters are to the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers*. We're talking about a group of people who have *one-button mice*, for cripes' sakes. Ever try playing *TFC* with that? It's like taking on the Cuban army with a dull toothpick and a God Is My Co-Pilot bumper sticker slapped on your ass. Thinking Different™ — like the ubiquitous Mac slogan encourages — can't save you in a gunfight with PC players.

So developers, kindly pay notice to your Mac audience — they're out there, they're more than deserving of quality ports, and the fact that they use computers with baby-blue Dalmatian spots makes them all the more satisfying to blow up in online bloodbaths. Keep throwing them bones. I can use more tournament prizes. PCG

A UNIT OF 40 FOOT KILLING IS ONLY DWARFED BY THE MAN WHO



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MICHAEL WOLF
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Friends, Iridians, Countrymen

When it comes to creating a MMORPG, what better way to do it than build upon an already-proven text-based MUD?



The Roman-themed city of Iridine will be home to centurions, senators, thieves, and everything in between.

Back in December 1998, I wrote a column about a text-based MUD (Multi-User Dungeon) by the name of *The Eternal City* (*www.eternal-city.com*). I praised it for its intense environment, unique Roman-themed fantasy setting (centered on a city called Iridine), and friendly denizens, who created an atmosphere in which real role-playing was strongly facilitated.

Since then, the game has slowly grown and is now listed as one of the top MUD sites at *www.topmudsites.com*. So why am I revisiting the subject? Well, *The Eternal City* is going 3D — with a vengeance.

Scott Martins, president of Worlds Apart Productions and founder of *The Eternal City*, plans to turn the text-based MUD into a massively multiplayer roleplaying game that offers things players of other, more popular MMORPGs can only dream about — features like running a player-based judicial system and player-run politics (very important in a Roman-themed world run by a Senate).

The game, which will be called *The Eternal City: Ereal Rising*, is strongly founded in Republican Rome. "It seemed like a perfect setting for a roleplaying game," Martins says. "Republican Rome was home to a fascinating political and social environment that was full of all of these wonderfully balanced tensions between rich and poor, monarchy and republic, civic duty and individualism." Plus it had gladiators.

That environment is one of the biggest aspects of the original MUD, in which gamers partake in their own political and judicial system. Some players are constables (the cops) while others make up the courts and Senate. *Ereal Rising* would be the first 3D MMORPG to feature in-game consequences for what Martins calls "grief players" — those more interested in ruining the roleplaying experience for others than getting involved in the game the way the developers designed it.

As Martins describes: "By putting disciplinary tools in the hands of players, a significant percentage of grief-player issues will not have to be dealt with by staff members. Jail sentences, fines, and demotions in social status are some of the consequences of getting caught for committing in-game crimes."

The logistics of preparing a game world to support this kind of system will be a nightmare, but Martins is confident it will work. "The player constabulary is a guild-type organization with a hierarchy of responsibility and power," he says. "Constable activities are logged, and Gamemaster staff work closely with the group to monitor and review issues as they arise. This is not to say that constables and other player participants couldn't (and shouldn't) successfully and enjoyably be 'corrupt' within the system."

This player-run format will hopefully lead to a new type of roleplaying in computer games. Forget playing the role of a sickly mage or overconfident warrior — how about tackling the job of a Senator with a flock of thugs at your beck and call? Or even a court dandy cozying up to the rich and famous?

"Based on the historical Roman model, wealthier players may adopt a formal social circle of friends and supporters," Martins says. "Artists, craftspeople, and lower-ranking politicians will become the clients of wealthy patrician characters, exchanging support and associated prestige for a stipend and other material needs." Built into the game mechanics, the patron in turn receives a boost in his social standing and more political support.

Of course, those without a political bent can try other careers, such as a blacksmith or tailor, which is another exciting aspect Martins says the 3D game will support: "Character models will have interchangeable parts, body types, and skin components, allowing for a wide range of variety, as well as the possibility for player contributions to art assets. Player-character cosmeticians and hairdressers will be able to alter the faces and hair of their friends. And weavers, tailors, and seamstresses will be able to create clothing and experiment with color and material combinations to make their creations unique."

The goal of any massively multiplayer game is to create a roleplaying environment that lets players immerse themselves in a world filled with intrigue, fantasy, and entertainment. "That doesn't mean we want to force people to roleplay," adds Martins. "We're really just aiming for an immersive environment, where D00Dism and Eminem are left behind for awhile. If you honestly incentivize the kind of behavior you want players to adopt, they'll largely do it."

There's a lot more to *Ereal Rising*, so visit *www.worlds-apart.com* for more information and updates on the game's progress. PCG



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In the Line of Fire

Once again, Trotter delves deep into the minutiae of military history to answer *your* burning questions.

Numerous grognards and firearms enthusiasts have written us to ask, "What the hell kind of rifle was that GI carrying on the cover of your February 2001 issue?" These (occasionally intemperate) missives were naturally forwarded to me, which posed a real challenge in esoteric research. After all, I *knew* that no one in our esteemed Art Department would be dumb enough to depict, on the cover of an issue featuring World War II games, a made-up rifle that never existed!

Well, it took a lot of digging, but I finally found the answers in the book *Obscure and Unsuccessful Small Arms of the Second World War* (Bastinado Press, Van Nuys, Calif., 1978). The weapon shown was the Swiss "Zurich/Gstaadt" Nine (ZUG-9, also known as "The William Tell").

The rifle represented Switzerland's one and only attempt to cash in on the international small-arms market. By 1938, it was obvious to the ever-industrious Swiss that global war was looming. A directive went out from the ruling Socialist-Democratic-Syndicalist government for the country's leading artisans to develop "a rifle that represents the acme of Switzerland's great tradition of fine workmanship."

The result was a unique design — somewhat over-engineered perhaps, but quite ingenious. In fact, the ZUG-9 was the world's first (and only) "semi-automatic bolt-action" rifle. It worked like this (see schematic diagram):

(1) Gas pressure from a fired round activated the cocking spring and piston, which in turn...

(2) Engaged the "ejecting glove" (a mechanical hand similar to the three-fingered white gloves worn by numerous Walt Disney cartoon characters), which opened the bolt and pushed down...

(3) A cantilevered spike that punctured the seal of a CO_2 cartridge (good for 20 rounds of sustained firing), creating the pressure required to activate...

(4) The "cocking glove," which drove home the bolt, chambering a fresh cartridge when the user squeezed the trigger once. A *second* trigger-pull (requiring 8.6 lbs of squeeze) was required to actually fire the round. This feature, naturally, took some getting used to, and would have been of dubious utility under combat conditions.

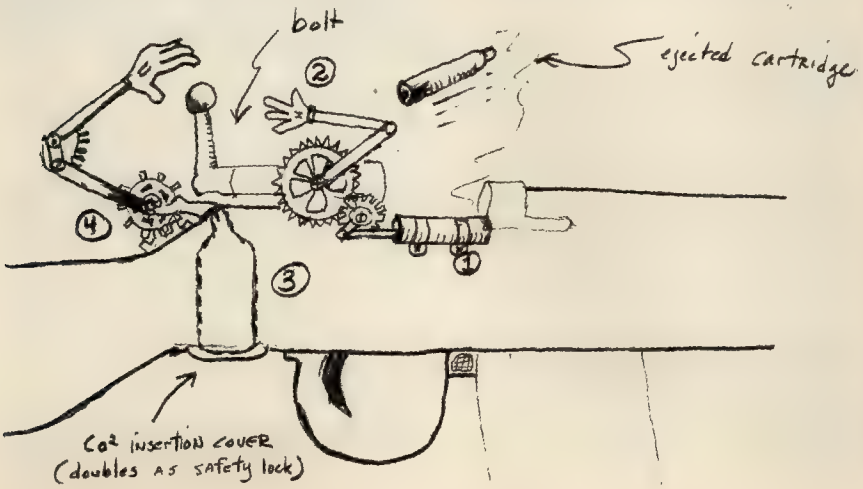
The caliber was 33.3. An experienced rifleman could deliver 11 rounds per minute (when everything worked properly). The magazine capacity was 13 rounds — a perhaps unfortunate design choice from a psychological point of view. Superstitious soldiers loaded only 12 rounds, which frequently caused the elegant but fragile magazine-feed mechanism to jam.

So far as I was able to determine, no ordnance department in any country showed the slightest interest in this exotic weapon, with the notable exception of the Polish Army, which thought it was "really neat" and ordered 400,000 rifles without even bothering to test-fire the piece. Whether the "William Tell" rifle would have helped the Poles repel the Nazi legions is a moot point, since none of the weapons reached Warsaw before the start of hostilities.



Specimens of this bizarre firearm are exceedingly rare today, and command high prices on the collectors' market. According to some Swiss sources, however, the rifle's curious mechanism was later adapted, after certain modifications, as the basis for a high-priced brand of ski binding.

So that's the story. The American GI might not have actually had one, but the ZUG-9 was a very real weapon of the era. Bravo, art team! PCG

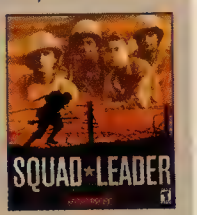


WHAT'S IN A NAME?

From reader Mark DeBonis comes this emailed plea: "I am so sick of the overuse of the word 'grognard' by yourself and others... that I have begun replacing it with 'GONAD' in my mind whenever I come across it. I realize it's a cool bit of terminology, but it's way overused. P.S. — My spellchecker doesn't even recognize it!"

Neither does mine, Mark! I agree completely, and I like the virile connotations of "GONAD." But how about "Drangorg" ("Grognard" spelled backward) instead? Or a snappy Pentagonese acronym, such as Keith Zabalaoui's clever "ENeGMA" ("The Emperor's New Game Machine Affliction")?

Let's have a contest! Send in your suggestions for the best word to replace "grognard," and if yours is declared the winner, you'll receive a slightly used review copy of Hasbro's *Squad Leader*! Hey, at least it's free.



ANDY MAHOOD
simcolumn@pcgamer.com



SIM COLUMN

Pushing Computer Tin

Relax in the comfort of your own home with one of the most stressful occupations in the world.

Simulation games come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but clearly one of the more esoteric shapes is *circular*. Specifically, in the form of an Air Traffic Controller's radarscope.

As a relatively obscure subgenre of the flight-simulation community, ATC sims — which place you behind the controls of one of those big amber radar screens used at major airports around the world — are coming to a PC near you, in numbers that will likely surprise a lot of people. I know I was shocked to discover that there will be no fewer than three separate products arriving on the market this year. This is even more remarkable when you consider that there hasn't really been a serious ATC simulation on the shelves since BAO's *Tower* back in the mid-'90s.

Although definitely an acquired taste (kinda like drinking sour mash whiskey straight up), ATC sims cater to a highly enthusiastic fan base. There's something about the process of navigating some fuzzy little blips safely through one's virtual "airspace" that seems to appeal to the aeronautic accountant in some of us. Besides, after portraying a badass air traffic controller in the movie *Pushing Tin*, Billy Bob Thornton managed to wind up with the luscious Angelina Jolie on his arm in real life. Surely there must be something to be said for that.

So in no particular order, here's a brief rundown on the latest crop of ATC simulators to hit the PC market.

ATC SIMULATOR

Easily the splashiest and most ambitious of the new releases, PC Aviator's *ATC Simulator* (reviewed in *PC Gamer*, June 2001, pg. 81; rating: 61%) is also about as hardcore as they come. The entire game revolves both literally and figuratively around the sweep hand of a large amber TRACON (Terminal Radar Approach CONtrol facility) radarscope as you vector dozens of arriving and departing aircraft through a whopping selection of 48 U.S. airports. Festooned with every single knob, dial, and switch found on the real FAA-approved ARTS-IIIa radarscope, this complex sim comes with the steepest learning curve of any ATC release you're likely to encounter.

The love child of former Boeing and McDonnell Douglas consultant Brad Davis, this sim also features a built-in career module, real-world air-traffic designations, and bundled voice-recognition software that lets you move planes around the sky using voice commands just like the real tower jocks. Unfortunately, the voice-recognition component simply doesn't work on many systems, and coupled with the absence of a truly dynamic flight environment (all of the sim's one-hour scenarios are canned), only the most dedicated knob-twisters will enjoy this one. For the real grognards in the crowd, however, *ATC Simulator* could be just what the FAA ordered. (PC Aviator; *www.pcaviator.com*; $59.95)

AIR COMMAND 3.0

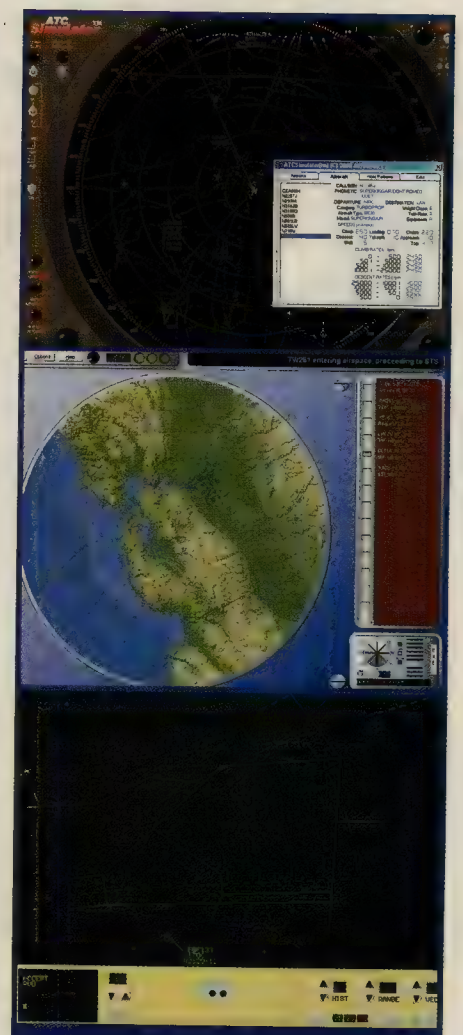
A much more relaxed treatment of the whole ATC environment, *Air Command 3.0* plays more like a game than any of the other hardcore sims on this page. Another one-man labor of love, *AC3* was developed by Joe Jaworski to fill the void left in the ATC sim market with the demise of classics like *Tracon* and *Tower*. Featuring 10 international airports, digitized pilot voices, Doppler weather effects, and multiple difficulty levels, *AC3* comes with a user-friendly interface that even casual gamers will be able to pick up quickly. The traditional monochrome radarscope has been replaced with a full-color map of your selected airspace, and should you manage to generate a mid-air collision somewhere, klaxons will sound and the entire screen will flash to emphasize your failure.

Although not the most authentic ATC simulator around, *AC3* throws enough atmosphere into the mix to make you forget that you've been staring for hours at some fancy clock-shaped doohickey with little bugs crawling all over it. (Shrapnel Games; *www.shrapnelgames.com*; $34.95)

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTER

ATCC isn't really a new release, because it's been available as a free download from developer Chris Coon's Xavius Software website for a while now. Version 1.0 of this surprisingly deep freeware program boasts not only realistic radar sectors from New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, but also simulated weather and a built-in career module. The 59-page manual that accompanies *ATCC* speaks volumes about the complexity and depth of this nifty little 650K program.

A little rougher around the edges than the other two sims, *ATCC* is due to be replaced by *ATCC* version 2.0 — which will offer new sectors, improved screens, and full sound support — in late fall. (Xavius Software; *www.xavius.com*; freeware) PCG



(Top) *ATC Simulator* features an honest-to-god ARTS-IIIa radarscope with all of the appropriate knobs and buttons. (Middle) The full-color relief map and mouse-friendly control scheme in *Air Command 3.0* are much more likely to please the relaxed-realism set. (Bottom) Though considerably less polished than its retail competitors, *Air Traffic Control Center* offers a surprising amount of depth.

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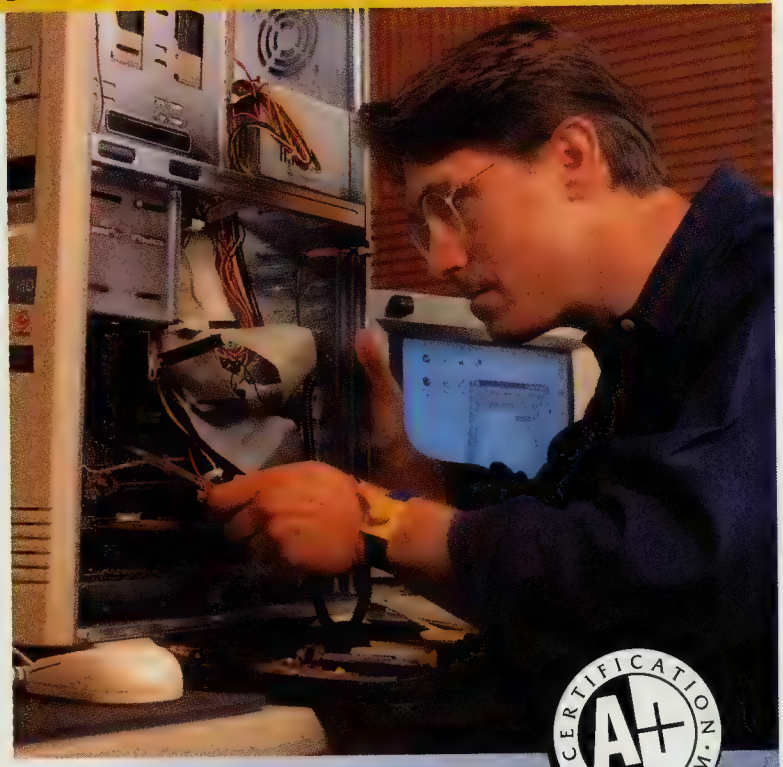
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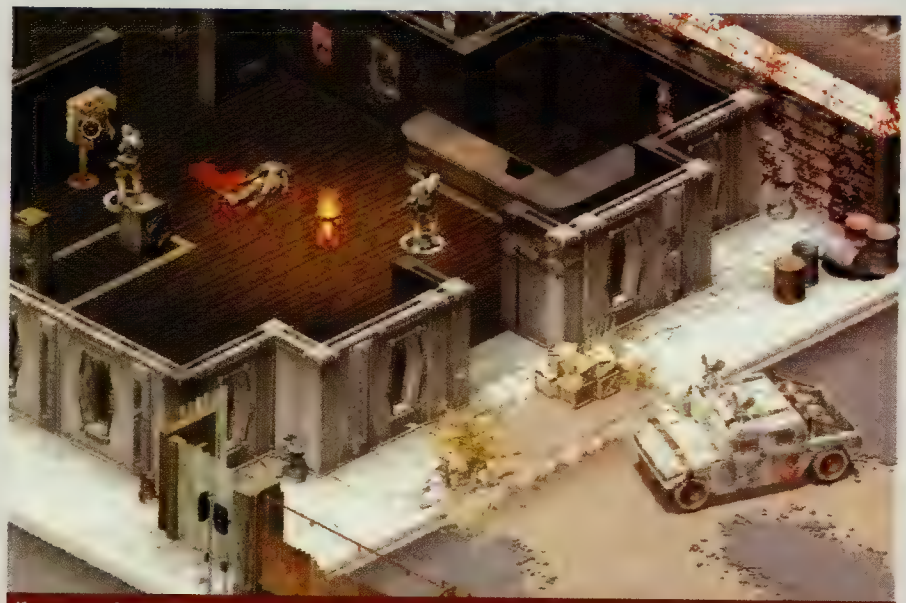
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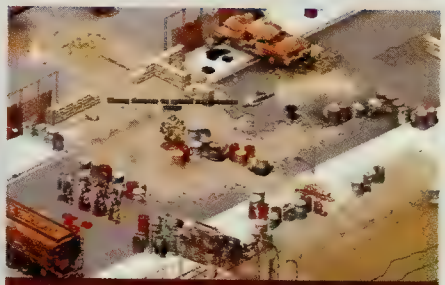
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Fallout Tactics

At ease, Brother. Welcome to Advanced Initiate Training. Listen up and you might survive through to the end. Fail to heed this advice and you'll find yourself out-gunned, out-thought, and out-classed. This lesson will be divided into character development and in-the-field tactics, so get ready!



If you see a lever, pull the damn thing! It's there for a reason.



A classic Burst-friendly position — let the enemy walk into the grinder.

Character Development: Skills You'll Need for the Wasteland

When putting together a squad, pick characters that you're going to want to stick with until the end. Characters that progress under your control for 20 levels will be customized to your requirements and more useful than simply picking a "generic" 20th-level character later in the game.

EVERYBODY DOES DAMAGE: *Don't* specialize a character so much that he becomes ineffectual in battle. At a minimum, a character should have at least one high-level combat skill. We prefer ranged combat (small guns, big guns, and energy weapons) to hand-to-hand fighting. Key perks for combat are Action Boy, Bonus Ranged Damage, Bonus Range of Fire, Dodger, and Sharpshooter. Additionally, high Agility means more action points.

WEAPON SKILLS: The most powerful armaments in the game are energy weapons and big guns. You'll find big guns far earlier than energy weapons, so we suggest developing the majority of your characters into big-gun masters. Most big guns have steep strength requirements, but the perk Weapon Handling can alleviate much of that problem. Later in the game you'll want a couple of energy-weapon experts to take advantage of the powerful armaments found on the last levels.

MAIN CHARACTER: Your lead character will be the person promoted within the brotherhood and the one who gains a reputation in the wastelands. We suggest you create a combat-oriented lead character with a set of starting stats that look like this: **ST 6, PE 6, EN 6, CH 7, IN 5, AG 8, LK 3** with the Small Frames option picked. Because equipment costs money, we suggest the lead character be the barter guy for the squad — his reputation and rank will affect pricing. So pick the Tag skills Small Guns, Big Guns, and Barter. Later, use a perk to get Tag and choose Energy Weapons. Other, non-combat perks for your lead character: Master Trader, Leader, Negotiator, Pack Rat, Salesman, Strong Back, and Team Player.

SCOUT: You'll need at least one character with a high Sneak skill in order to scout effectively. We suggest adding the Traps and Lock Picking skills as well. This character can discover and disarm mines, as well as open locked doors. Agility and Perception are your scout's key statistics. Always get the Crazy Bomber perk for the traps expert. Other good perks: Awareness, Tag, Silent Running, and Educated.

FIXER: This character fixes anything — human or machine. This will require high Doctor, First Aid, Science, and Repair skills. There are science books floating around the wastelands, so don't spend too many points on the Science skill. When a character gets "bandaged," use the Doctor skill. Intelligence and Perception are important statistics for this character. Perks to get: Comprehension, Educated, Healer, Medic, Stat, Tag, and Mr. Fixit.

DRIVER: Drives vehicles and speeds up the game. Skills: Piloting and Outdoorsman. Combined with a few key perks, a good driver can not only get the crew where they need to go in a hurry, but will also avoid repeated random encounters on the world map — which, for the most part, only serve to lower your ammunition. Perks for this character: Lead Foot, Pathfinder, Ranger, Road Warrior, and Survivalist. Once the squad has a vehicle, always travel in it.

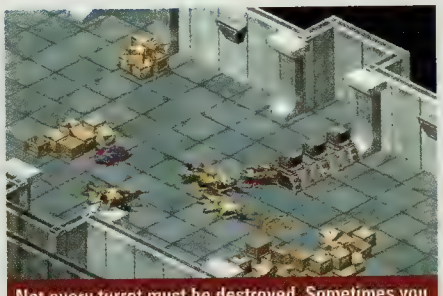
Since raising a skill is more expensive after you get one into the high 100s, don't take any of the perks that raise a skill by a



Never trust quartermasters: their job is to rip you off, and cash is scarce.



Always stay in your vehicle and avoid random fights in the wilderness. They'll only waste your ammo.



Not every turret must be destroyed. Sometimes you can run past them.

percentage until you're already an expert. Perks are rare, so never waste them!

Tactical Warfare: Kicking Ass and Taking Names

There are pros and cons to using either continuous or team turn-based modes. In continuous mode your characters will deal more damage faster, but encounters will be less controlled and your party will likely take more damage. Use this mode in earlier levels and whenever the battle looks strongly in your favor. Turn-based mode will slow the game down so you can plan better. Late in the game, as the situation gets more dangerous, you'll probably want to be in turn-based mode most of the time, regardless.

ACTION POINTS: Pay attention to the action points required for the guns characters carry. It's an advantage in turn-based mode to carry two weapons whose action-point requirements equal the action-point total of the character. This way, the character can fire both weapons every turn.

POWERFUL SMALL GUNS: M-79 Grenade Launcher, Colt .45, Steyr AUG, Sniper Rifle, M-72 Gauss rifle, Pancor Jackhammer.

POWERFUL BIG GUNS: Browning M-2 (the most powerful machine gun in the game), Gatling Gauss, M-249 SAW, Rocket Launcher, Vindicator Mini Gun.

POWERFUL ENERGY WEAPONS: Gatling Laser Gun, Pulse Rifle, Sunbeam Laser Rifle.

AMMO: Always save 7.62 mm ammunition and never pass up .50-caliber ammo. The Vindicator Mini Gun and Browning M-2 are great weapons if you've got the bullets. It's heavy, but the ammo for the M-79 grenade launcher should also be saved — even if you need to leave it on the ground back at the barracks to save space.

TACTICAL POSITIONS: Make sure to put your Burst-weapon users in front of the rest of your team. While effective, this setting is dangerous because anyone caught in the spread gets hit. Throwing is also a dangerous skill because of the failure rate, so always keep a thrower away from the pack. Regardless of the character type, always look for cover. If you can hide behind something, even partially, it will decrease your likelihood of being shot.

Fallout Tactics requires both brains and brute force. If possible, scout an area before heading to your objectives and plan your approach, always consulting the Pipboy map. That said, you'll sometimes find yourself in situations where the best way through an area will be to rush in, guns blazing in continuous mode. In these situations, you can be guaranteed of a beating, but if you've picked your fight well, you'll win.

KOHAN: IMMORTAL SOVEREIGNS STRATEGY

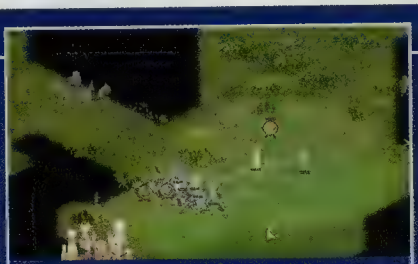
Balancing all your units and resources is tricky. Or so it was until this indispensable guide appeared...

- When starting a game, quickly get familiar with your surroundings. Look for locations that are lacking natural defenses and plug these weaknesses with companies.
- Worry about your gold supply before you worry about other resources. Wood and stone are extremely important, but money is what really makes your kingdom function. Save your money via banks, rather than increasing your resources right off the bat.
- Create at least one engineering company to take on long marches and scouting missions. This way, you can set up an outpost as a supply source should it become necessary.
- Companies can't heal while they are engaged in combat — even if you're fighting in a zone of supply. Thus, we suggest you include a healing unit such as a Cleric in defensive companies, to increase the length of time your front line is able to fight effectively.
- Send scouting companies to seek out weaknesses in enemy positions. When attacking, try to avoid a direct confrontation until you reach a favorable and opportune position. When sending multiple companies to attack, don't clump them into one group. By attacking from many directions, you'll force your enemy to break up his companies to deal with you — thus creating weaknesses in his kingdom's defensive structure. You'll also distract your opponent and keep him too busy to deal with his other areas of control throughout the map.
- Attacking several of your enemy's bases at once, while sending the brunt of your own forces to his main base, is a good way to make quick work of him.

BASIC RULE OF THUMB: Never become predicable when pursuing your enemies; always keep them guessing.



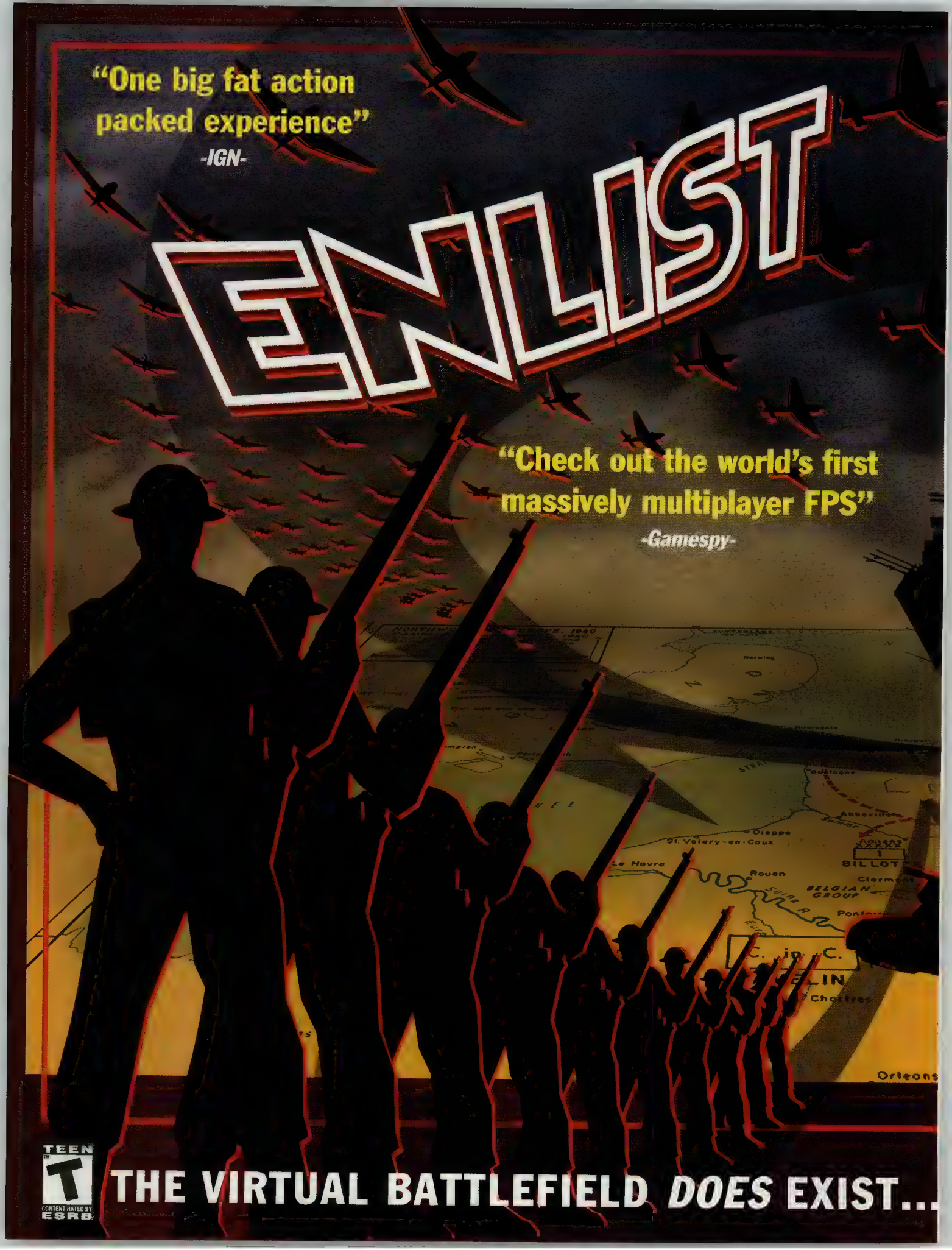
Dragons can be vicious foes.



CHEATS

Open the message box and enter any of the following cheats. (Note: All codes but the first four work only in single-player games.)

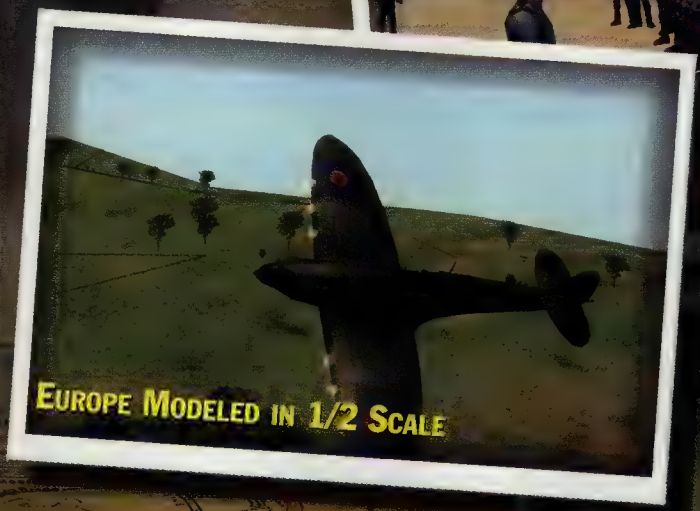
free gold 500 gold for everyone.
hoody hoo Extra production for everyone.
speed it up Fast build times for everyone.
grift shadow Increase company limit for everyone.
feeling fine Restore all your morale.
show fog Toggle the fog.
there is no spoon Allow all units to be recruited.
unpleasant dreams Start the cataclysm.
i repent Stop the cataclysm.
yeahbam End the mission in victory.
yeahbam 0 End the mission as a loss.
samurai dragon [city name] Spawn a dragon to protect the city.


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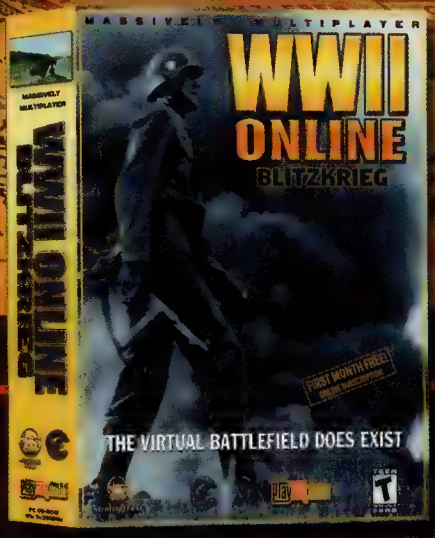
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Tribes 2



It might look like outdoor *Quake*, but in reality, *Tribes 2* is a whole lot more than that. So if you start playing this game as if it's a regular ol' shooter, you may be in for trouble. Our trusty guide will provide you with general strategies for swatting derriere and swapping addresses.



There is such a thing as a noble death. When you're low on health, kamikaze the enemy's base defenses.

OFFENSIVE STRATEGY

GENERAL TIPS

- When trying to get to a location quickly, use the "skiing technique." Do this by holding your jump key while running down a hill, applying your jetpack at the bottom of the hill, and continuing to apply it as you glide/run to the top of the next ridge. You'll get a substantial speed burst if you do it right.
- When going for a flag, use either the cloak pack or the shield pack. The cloak pack will make it almost impossible for enemies to see you, and the shield pack will protect you from everything except the blaster, the ELF gun, and lava.
- In most situations, the scout armor is best when going for the enemy flag. Assault-class armor should be used only if you are accompanied by another soldier or are using a vehicle. Avoid using the juggernaut when attacking the enemy flag. The juggernaut is mostly a defensive unit, but can also be used on offense for destroying base turrets and enemy generators.
- When you're low on health and about to die, and in a vehicle, take the kamikaze way out and crash into a building, hopefully causing mass collateral damage.

HOW TO BE A FLAG HERO

When capturing the flag, be sure to have an energy pack ready for a quick getaway. Without one, the little goblins on your heels will easily chase you down. You'll want to be using scout armor and be equipped with a disc launcher, chain gun, and blaster. Also, grab grenades (concussion or whiteout) and mines. Speed and stealth are the hallmarks of flag heroes.

Once you've got the enemy flag in your sights, remember these four simple steps:

- Watch for guards by the flag; if there are any, call in teammate support or be patient and wait for the flag defenders to leave.
- Shoot a disc at the flag's base to clear it of any mines.
- Instead of walking over to the flag, use your boosters to get there fast.
- Be sure you're pointing toward your base, hit the afterburners, and get the hell out of there, making good use of the skiing technique.

With enemies in hot pursuit, rather than keeping your back to them, turn around and face them, taking opportune pot-shots while continuing to move toward your base. Shoot discs, toss grenades and mines — do anything you can to slow your attackers, and call for support. You might just get back to your base safely.

DELICIOUS METHODS OF MUTILATING ENEMIES

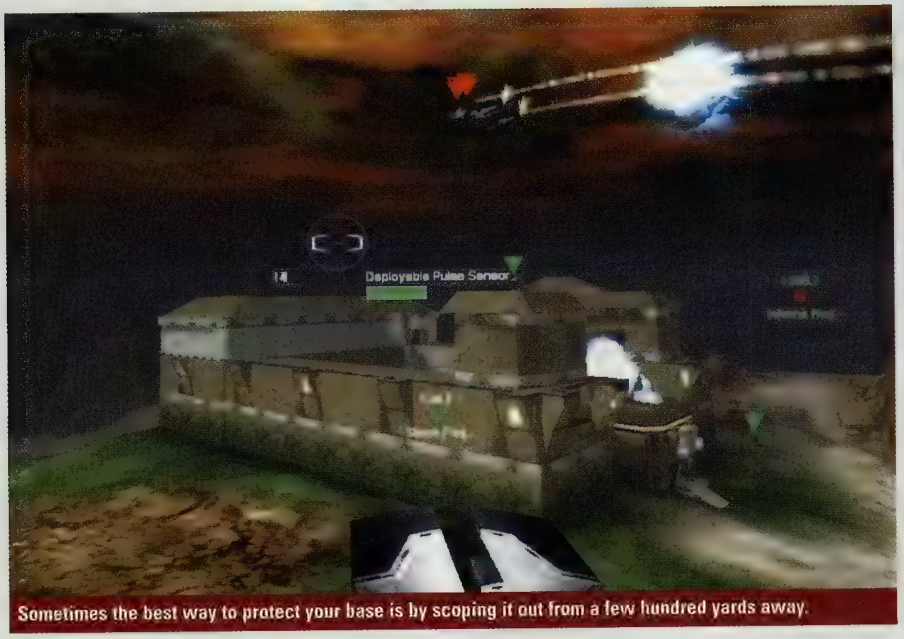
Here are some terrifically effective strategies that aren't commonly used:

SUCK IT HARD!: The ELF gun is a tragically underused weapon that sucks energy from enemies, limiting their boosting capability and use of other energy-based packs and weapons. The ELF can keep your opponent grounded long enough for you to change to the disc launcher and take him out.

"ZAPPED" ISN'T JUST A BAD SCOTT BAIO MOVIE: Nailing a sniper isn't always easy. Unless you're a crack shot, shooting at one with discs often gives him enough time to get away. The shocklance isn't so forgiving. When you find a lonely sniper, simply sneak up behind him with the shocklance and give him a good zap. He'll be fried with one shot. The shocklance is also useful for disposing of heavy armors: because they're slow-moving, you can easily get in close and toast 'em.



Once you get the flag, DON'T stop moving until you're back at your base — or dead.



Sometimes the best way to protect your base is by scoping it out from a few hundred yards away.

CONCUSSION GRENADES: USE THEM!: These are great! While in battle, drop one in the path of your enemy, and if it hits him hard enough, he'll drop some (or most) of his items and weapons.

DEFENSIVE STRATEGY

GENERAL TIPS

- If you need to deploy turrets, deploy a remote inventory station near the placement area for quick, easy access.
- Don't place random mines around the flag. Hover right above your flag and drop a mine straight on to the base so it's less noticeable.
- Make sure you boost the efficiency of your spider-clamp turrets by placing remote motion sensors nearby.
- Place remote pulse sensors near landspike turrets.
- Extra flag defense: place a remote-detonation satchel charge and a deployable camera near your flag. Hide in a secluded area and activate your camera in the command circuit. Wait until someone nabs your flag and time the satchel activation so that you kill him as he tries to escape.
- Be careful when shooting enemies within your base. Try not to use the blaster, grenade launcher, or mortar, as those weapons are just as likely to injure you and yours as they are to hurt your foes.

DEFENSE UP IN THE HIZOUSE!

Defense is fun, really. The main areas to defend in a CTF game are your flag and your generators.

- Place spider-clamp turrets inside your base and lay motion sensors by each one. The best places to put these turrets are close to the item you're protecting, or at entrances and exits. Remember to use motion sensors for each turret to make sure they detect cloaked enemies.
- Place landspike turrets outside your base and set motion sensors by the turrets. Additionally, place extra sensor arrays close by to increase the turrets' effectiveness.
- Remember, defending a base is relatively easy. Just a few defensive measures will go a long way toward keeping the opposing team at bay.

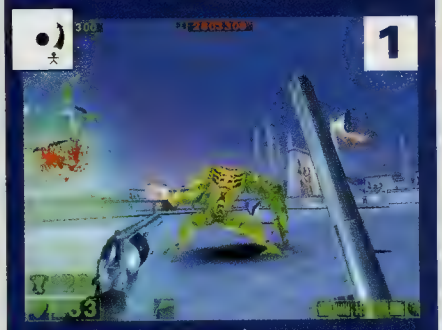

The chaingun is great for close-quarters battles: explosive weapons can do too much splash damage.


Make sure you always have jetpack power so you can escape when outgunned.

SERIOUS SAM STRATEGY

Getting through *Serious Sam* is no easy task. Baddies at every turn, throngs of adoring women everywhere *[what? — Ed.]*. The game is so difficult, in fact, that most people are forced to give up long before reaching the end.

That's where *PC Gamer* comes in. We've dug deep to bring you some of the most in-depth, hardcore strategy ever. Pay close attention... this stuff ain't easy.



Circle-Strafe (see diagram).



Circle-Strafe (see diagram).



Circle-Strafe (see diagram).



Circle-Strafe the other way for variety's sake (see diagram).

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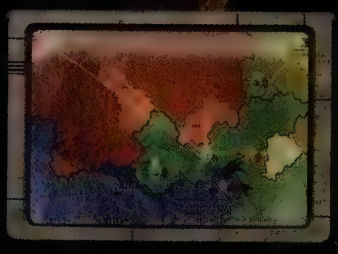
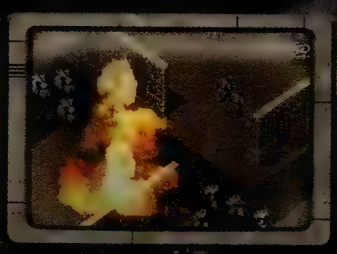
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Better get that athlete's foot taken care of, boys, or Max may come gunnin' for ya...

HE WHO SMELT IT DEALT IT

I just read the awesome preview of *Max Payne* in your May 2001 issue, and it looks like it will be one hell of a kickass game. But why, in the screenshots, does Max look like he smells stinky feet?

— Name withheld, via email

It's a little-known fact that evildoers have very *stinky feet. In the shots you mention, Max is up against a lot of* very *evil people. Note to people with stinky feet: we're on to you.*

THE DOG ATE MY HOMEWORK

Hey, I was wondering if I could get another copy of the latest issue of *PC Gamer*. I left mine out where my dogs sleep and it rained hardcore last week and my copy got totally trashed.

— Anthony, via email

Just out of curiosity, why were you reading your issue of PC Gamer *out where your dogs sleep in the first place? On second thought, we don't want to know. If you'd like to order a back issue, however, simply call, toll-free, 800-865-7240 and order away! You can purchase back issues with or without the* PC Gamer *CD. When calling, please make sure to specify the date of the issue you want, as our customer-service department doesn't sort by volume or issue number.*

WHEN INDEFINITE ARTICLES ATTACK

This past weekend, I was forced to endure something I can describe only as "HolySnarlyButtThisIsTerrible." As I was reading your *Max Payne* preview, a line caught my eye. I'd quote it, but all the pages are stuck together now. Anyway, you mentioned how much of the action in *Max Payne* is similar to a Chow Yun-Fat movie called *Killers*. To get some insight into the game, I decided to rent the movie based on your recommendation.

When I got to the rental place, I saw a movie named *Killers*. Its cover was missing, but I figured it must be the right one. So, I took the movie home and popped it in my VCR, and that's when the horror began (literally). It took me exactly two seconds to figure out that this was not an action film starring Chow Yun-Fat. Instead, it was a low-budget horror movie starring absolutely no one. Still, I sat through it because I had already spent my money and I was hoping for some gratuitous nudity. In the end, the film lacked even that.

I briefly considered suing you for the $4 rental, but as a fan and a longtime reader, I decided against it. Can you at least tell me the correct name of the Chow Yun-Fat film?

— David Coffman, via email

The movie you wanted to rent (as mentioned in our May 2001 issue) is called The Killer, *not* Killers. *Now run off and rent it before you manage to get these pages stuck together, too. Yuck!*

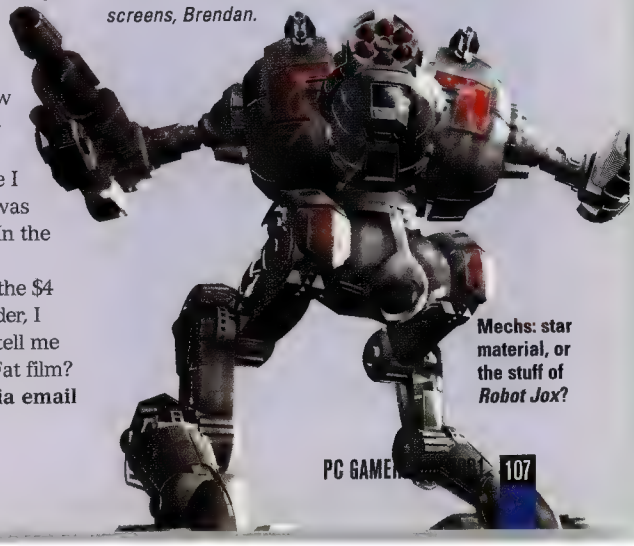
MECHWARRIOR: HE ISN'T REAL, BUT HIS LOVE IS

As I was reading the *Tomb Raider* movie article in March 2001's *PC Gamer*, I began to reflect on the seemingly idiotic choices of game-to-movie translations we've seen to date. Fighting games? Really, what's with that? There are far too many characters, not enough background, and no fluid story to speak of — no wonder these movies always tank at the box office. What should be produced are RPG-based movies with deep storylines and well-developed characters.

I think movie makers are finally moving in the right direction with *Tomb Raider*, *Duke Nukem*, and the one I believe has the most potential, *Resident Evil*. However, there still has to be one game-translated-to-movie breakout hit. And what is the perfect game to spawn this smash hit film? *MechWarrior*! It has everything a modern movie needs: a huge audience, endless storylines, rugged and noble characters, tons of special effects, and best of all, great big machines bristling with weapons. So, what are you producers waiting for? Go secure that license agreement!

— Brendan Butz, via email

You're forgetting about the King Kong of game-to-movie translations: Final Fantasy: The Movie. *If you're interested in roleplaying games, this is probably the one to look out for once it hits screens, Brendan.*


Mechs: star material, or the stuff of *Robot Jox*?

WHAT-CHU TALKIN' 'BOUT, CLARENCE?

I read your reviews so I don't waste my money on games that suck. I'm glad that I bought *Battle for Naboo* before I read your review, though, because I really think it's way better than the 15% you gave it. I'm not sure what game *you* were playing, but for me, the graphics were clean and the gameplay was quite smooth. Perhaps it's time to upgrade the system you use to test games or take a little more time to play them.

— Clarence Brewer, via email

Well, Clarence..."The world don't move to the beat of just one drum; what might be right for you may not be right for some. A man is born — he's a man of means. Then along come two — they've got nothin' but their jeans. But they got diff'rent strokes...it takes diff'rent strokes... it takes diff'rent strokes to move the world."

AT LEAST YOU DIDN'T BUY IT

I was at the local supermarket looking at the May edition of *Electronic Gaming Monthly* when I saw the most moronic sentence ever uttered by a human being: "If you want to play online games, a PC sucks." Then the speaker went on to complain about hardware issues and the like. Now, you're probably thinking whoever said that must be pretty stupid, right? Well, he is — he's Charles Bellfield, VP of Sega's marketing and corporate communications. This idiot should be fired for his stupidity.

— Welsh Drummon, via email

We tracked down the issue in question. Here's the complete quotation as printed in the May 2001 edition of EGM*: "If you want to play online games, a PC sucks. How many times do you have to reinstall [software like] Direct X? How much time did you waste having to decide on what graphics card to buy? On the PC side, you're always having to deal with the technical issues. For us, online gaming on a console has to be the same plug-and-play, ease-of-use experience our gamers expect."*

To be honest, it's difficult to argue with some of Charlie's points. Clearly, playing online games on the PC involves more of an investment in time, money, and effort than playing games on a console.

Those issues conceded, here's where Charlie's argument falls apart: Any game — online or otherwise — that involves the use of the keyboard and mouse (or that should involve the keyboard and mouse) is going to be demonstrably better on a PC. How are you going to effectively control first-person action games with a gamepad? You're not. How are you going to quickly and easily trash-talk after fragging your buddy in an online game without a keyboard? You're not. And yes, we know there's a keyboard for the Dreamcast...Know anyone who actually has one? Ever tried using a keyboard and mouse while sitting on a couch?

In the final analysis, some online games are going to be better on consoles than on PC, while others are going to be better on PC than on consoles. To say that one is going to replace the other, or that one "sucks" more than the other, is quite simply marketing BS.

CONFUSED LAD



Is the game *Soldier of Fortune* based on the book by Richard Harding Davis of the same name? Please tell me it's not — this book is just a bunch of laboring Mexicans and snooty English people having dinner parties, not soldiers blowing off parts of people's bodies.

— Cyberphreak777, via email



It wouldn't be much of an action game if it was based on that book, would it? No, the game actually uses a license from the magazine of the same name — not the book.

THE SIMPSONS' COMIC-BOOK GUY MEETS HIS MATCH

I enjoyed your satire on the China/U.S. spy-plane standoff in the reviews section of your June 2001 issue. I think the whole situation is rather unbelievable; your spoof helped cast a light of "This is insane" on the real-life event, and was a timely piece of writing.

However, the accompanying illustration is erroneous in that it portrays an E-3C Hawkeye, an aircraft launched from aircraft carriers to perform much the same function (AWACS tracking) as the Air Force's 707-based aircraft, the Sentry. As your illustration shows, the Hawkeye launches from carriers,

The aircraft on Hainan Island is an unrelated aircraft, an EP-3 Aries II. (I wonder if perhaps the similarity between "EP-3" and "E3-C" is the cause of the confusion.) The Aries is a cousin of the probably better-known P-3 Orion submarine hunter aircraft. It is significantly larger than the E-3, has four engines instead of two, does not have folding wings, and cannot operate from aircraft carriers. It does not, however, have the long tail antenna that the Orion antisub hunter does. Finally, the large dish radar of the Hawkeye is noticeably absent from the Aries II.

I respectfully refer you to the following information sheets on the two aircraft:



And for future use, Anup: "Never jejune, *NASCAR 4*'s consummate gameplay augurs its racing regnancy."

- EP-3E Aries II Fact File: *http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/factfile/aircraft/air-ep3e.html*
- E-2C Hawkeye Fact File: *http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/factfile/aircraft/air-e2c.html*

— Jennifer, via email

Clearly, you're forgetting about Uncanny X-Men *#244 (May 1989) — the very first appearance of the mutant known as Jubilee. If you could have been bothered to read all of the "important" issues from the month in question, you'd have understood our reasoning on the matter. We declare this letter to be the worst reader feedback EVER!*

TODAY'S WORD IS "INGENUITY"

I'm in eighth grade and my Language Arts teacher makes my class memorize 40 words each week. Then, if we find any of the words in a newspaper or magazine, we get extra credit toward our final grade in the class.

I spotted one such word in your *NASCAR Racing 4* review in the April 2001 issue — "cacophony" — and I got extra credit for finding it and showing it to my teacher. That got me thinking, could you guys please include the following words in your *next* issue: Hypothecate, Putative, Sangfroid, Confluence, Mollify, Altercation, Lycanthrope, Vivacious, and Exculpate? I sure hope you find it in your hearts to help a loyal *PC Gamer* reader like myself.

— Anup, via email

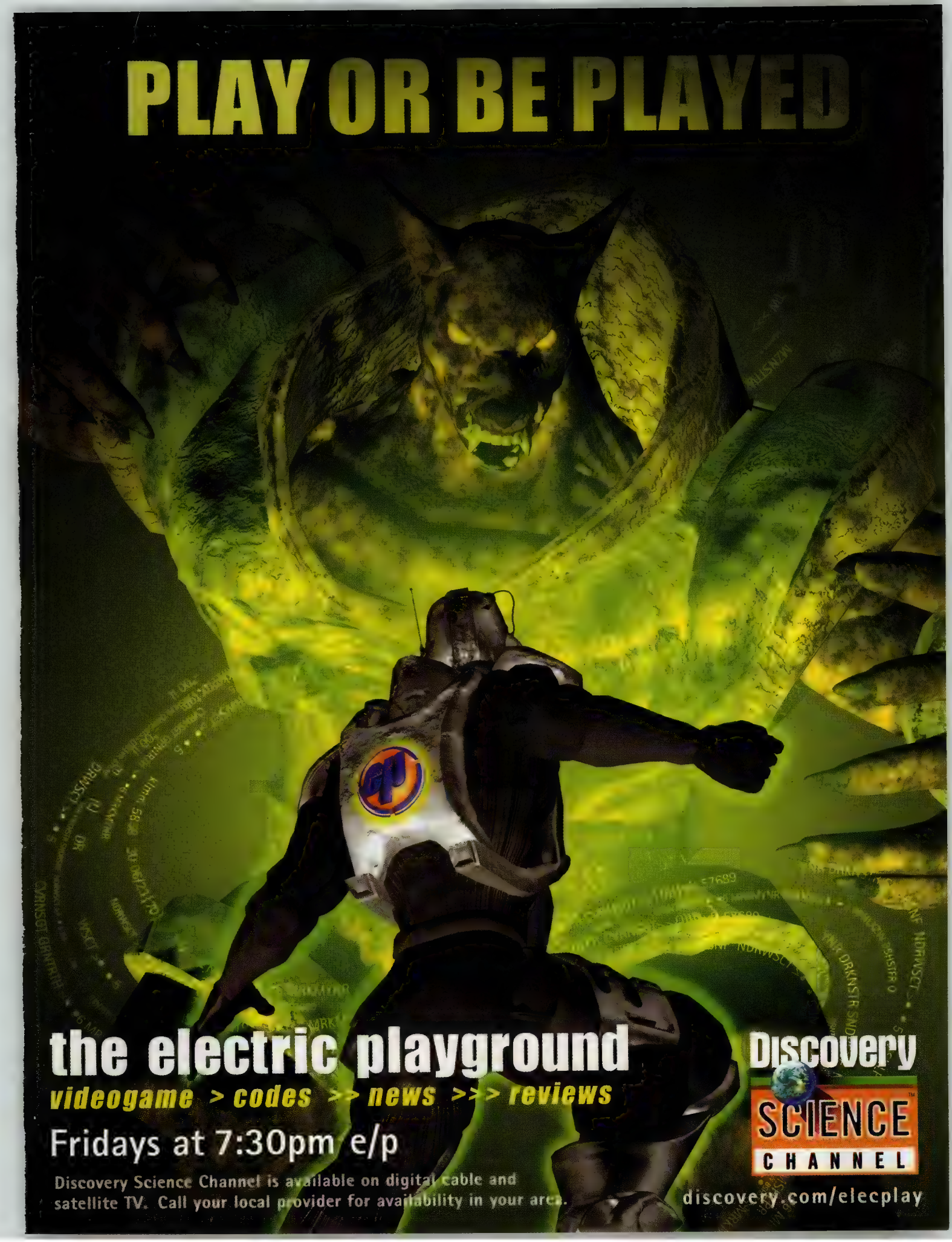
Sure thing! Simply show your teacher this page and those extra-credit points should come rolling in. Cha-ching!

COVER-TO-COVER GOODNESS

I find myself buying your magazine month after month and then taking it home to read cover to cover. My favorite section is Hard Stuff, but I love the whole magazine. I can't even begin to count how many times I've taken your advice to heart when making purchases. I don't think there's a magazine I'd like to read more than *PC Gamer*.

— Mike Lara, via snail mail

Thanks, Mike. It's letters like yours that make it all so worthwhile. Oh, and playing games for a living. PCG


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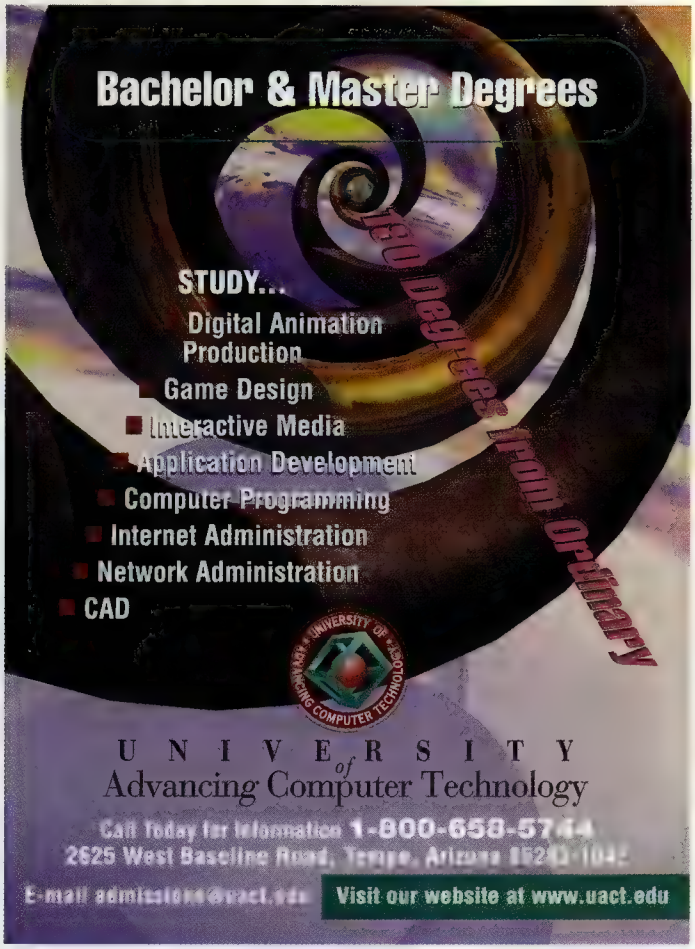
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BACKSPACE

Welcome to the all-new Backspace section, where industry experts will give us the benefit of their insights into a variety of issues affecting PC gaming. We're kicking things off by exploring a gamemaking essential.

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

AI Programming

From Richard Evans, AI programmer at Lionhead Studios for *Black & White*



- **Start with a clear and ambitious design: we wanted to make creatures who were plausible, malleable, useful, and loveable.**
- Peter [Molyneux] is very good at providing vision because he is a very competent programmer himself.
- **There have been times when it has been incredibly hard work.**
- It doesn't really matter where you work as long as you've got a reasonable computer and a nice cup of tea.
- **Lionhead has excellent tea-making facilities.**
- There is no one "magic trick" to creating a good AI.
- **Peter expects a lot, but I can't pretend it hasn't been worth it.**
- **Making a good AI involves lots of different techniques, and requires careful design and organization to make the different techniques work together.**
- My hero is Brian Cantwell Smith, who is both an AI programmer and a philosopher. As a Ph.D. student he developed a technique for making computer programs "conscious" of their mental states — really fascinating stuff. I think he's gone a bit off the boil recently, though.
- **One large step forward will be the development of empathetic agents.**
- *Black & White* is just the beginning of this empathetic stage.
- **Creatures can get addicted to magic mushrooms.**
- The implementation of empathy [is the most pleasing AI achievement in *B&W*]: the creatures build up a mental model of their masters from watching what they are doing.
- **Creatures try to understand what goals could motivate their masters to do the actions they do.**
- There is a Creature AI editor, in which you can see and modify the creatures' minds. It would be nice to allow the community access to it.
- **A significant step forward will be the development of a Counterfactual Engine. That's an engine capable of answering "What if?" questions in real time — e.g., "What will happen if I throw that stone at this guy?"**
- The *Creatures* programs have impressive AI, but are not really games.
- **Five years from now, game AI will give us worlds with hundreds of autonomous, malleable, empathetic, communicating agents.**
- HAL9000 went crazy because of existential angst.
- **I spent a couple of years developing AI techniques in my bedroom.**
- We have had to work very hard, with ridiculously long hours, on *Black & White*.
- **Creatures' footprints turn into smiley faces on April Fools' Day.**
- **Learn as much as you can at college — there's no point trying to reinvent the wheel.** PCG

NEXT MONTH

Inside game development. A new company. New rules. We're there.

One of the highest-profile game developers in PC history has a new pet project, and it's cause to get everyone at *PC Gamer* excited. We go deep inside a brand-new game company, witness the baby steps of its growth, and get inside the development of two incredibly hot PC game properties. And they're both sequels. Excited?

Webisodic gaming is coming of age

We get the skinny on the great games that are breaking the retail mold and launching the webisodic frenzy.

PC GAMER

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Ensign Jensen pulled his SBD Dauntless from the steep dive as the relentless *ca-chung ca-chung ca-chung* of flak exploded all around. The plane rattled and shook violently as if it were dangling from a string. "Holy crap!" he heard his gunner scream through his headphones. A rush of fear overcame Jensen as he searched the dusty, grey sky, expecting his plane to dissolve into brilliant ball of orange light. He held onto his flight stick and closed his eyes when he heard the gunner scream again. "What is it?" Jensen cried aloud in a panicked voice. "Are we hit?" "No, sir," the gunner replied quickly. "The bomb went right through the flight deck. Beautiful drop, Ensign."

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